

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. How do you approach your quarterback situation? How do you deal with it?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I think it's just like any situation. I've been in these a few times, and that's why you always have to have contingency plans, and we'll see how the week unfolds. It's my job to be ready either way. We got in a similar situation last year with Russ and Justin week 1, and it's our job to adapt just like you do -- that's why I give Mason a lot of credit. People talk about being a pro, but that's a sign of a real pro because Mason does a good job preparing every week. You're always one play away; you always hear these hypotheticals. He was ready to roll and did a really nice job.

Q. I know plays are sometimes tailored to guys, what they like and what they don't like, but does the overall game plan, what you want to do, change?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think big picture strategy, how you're trying to attack the defense, a lot of times how you want to try to play a game in all three phases, obviously that can change. Circumstances can change quick, after a first drive or something happens in a game.

Certainly dealing with different quarterbacks, you always -- that's why the communication and preparation in a week, what guys are comfortable with. But the overall strategy, no, but there may be certain plays that you call depending on who's out there.

Q. Aaron told us yesterday that he's hoping to get on the field a little bit today. Is there something that you're looking to see from him that's telling you that he's ready, whether that's how he handles the snap or ball security, anything along those lines?

ARTHUR SMITH: I just trust him. This isn't his first rodeo. Again, every player is different. It's not like I've been with him a number of years; I have a lot of trust in Aaron, and I know that he knows how to prepare. He's been in different circumstances like this before. Whatever happens, I know

he'll be good either way.

Q. Mason talked about late in the week getting some plays that he likes. How much time do you spend with the backup getting him ready as a contingency?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, that's just the preparation for all those guys. That's the reality of the NFL, and that's why it's so important, at least for me. When we do our installs, I'm calling on guys that are P squad linemen or wide outs or backs. The reality in the NFL, the longer you -- everybody in here has covered this game for a long time, and we've all got stories we could tell about bizarre things that happened on Fridays and Saturdays or even Sunday mornings. You always try, especially young guys, to give them that perspective, that you have to prepare that you're starting. That's your job.

I mean, I've seen -- certainly in 2020 and 2021 was an extreme example. You never knew who was going to be up, and everybody had to be ready to go. It's the same way with the quarterbacks.

You spend a lot of time and preparation throughout that. But those things are important. With any backup quarterback, that way you're ready. You don't want to be caught ready and just hope something doesn't happen. That's part of your job. Mason did a really good job.

Q. What do you appreciate about the dynamic in your quarterback room? It seems like Mason and Aaron really like taking digs at each other. How have you seen them grow and interact?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, chemistry is so important. I think that's not talked about enough is chemistry and fit, staff, players, the dynamics in those rooms. This group, it's completely different. We've got four different guys in there right now that weren't here a year ago with Sky and Will and Aaron and Mason, and there's good chemistry in there. It makes it fun to come to work every day for sure.

Q. Two-minute drill at the end of the first half, Jaylen Warren doesn't get on the field. Was that a pre-determined plan that you had on the offense? Did you just want to get Gainwell in there? What was the

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reasoning for that when he's been one of your best playmakers?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I think both those guys are really good on 3rd down, and a lot of the two-minute drives, especially when you're in obvious pass situations and hurry-up, sometimes it's how the start of the drive went and what the plan was backed up, and then when you get on the ball sometimes a guy is in a rhythm and he ends up staying out there.

But those guys are pretty interchangeable, which is rare to have when you have two guys with a little bit different skill set but they're both really good 3rd down backs in their own way, which also can bleed into two-minute. It's as simple as when that drive started we were backed up and then he kind of got rolling.

Q. Along those lines, with their skill sets being somewhat similar, I'm sure it's not coincidence that Gainwell's two best games have come when he's had the most opportunity. Is there thought or consideration given if you want to spell Warren to maybe just give Gainwell his own series, have those guys be their own 3rd down back instead of subbing out on 3rd down to put Gainwell in for Warren when he's healthy?

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure. There's a lot of situations you go through. Sometimes it depends on how you want to attack 3rd down. Sometimes you have package things. Same thing when you have multiple tight ends. There's certain plays, packages that you have Darnell in, there's certain plays for Jonnu and Pat. We have some interchangeable pieces.

You can go by that logic, certainly. You can call it by series, or there's some times if you have some really specific things you want to get to on 3rd down, the personnel might dictate who's out there.

Really both those backs, it's just been a hot season in terms of, like, play counts. Some games -- I think of the second half of that game, we had two possessions. That's because we scored twice on defense. We still apparently won the time of possession, but not a lot of games have been where you only have two possessions in the second half.

But yeah, we talk about those situations every week. But the good problem to have is both those guys are really good players.

Q. Will Kaleb get some more touches here moving forward?

ARTHUR SMITH: Hopefully we get in a game where I can call 40 runs. That would be nice. We have yet to get there, to a 40-run game. It would be nice to do that on Sunday.

Q. I have a couple questions regarding the tush push. The play on Sunday, I think it was 4th and 1, it was pretty close, and it was actually reviewed. If Mason plays this Sunday, does that change anything? Will he be the one that actually takes the snap? My second question is when Aaron Rodgers is in there, he's normally just sitting behind the line of scrimmage. Have you thought about moving him over towards the sidelines and taking a defender with him?

ARTHUR SMITH: I'm not going to give up any strategy and plays we have, but I appreciate the question. There's a lot of scenarios, things you can do out of that. That one on that 4th and 1, that was a little bit of a strange one. They were standing over the ball after we huddled, which was interesting, and they said because of the wind, so that one was a little bit slower. You always have counterpunches off of it, and if the situation comes up maybe this Sunday, maybe the next Sunday, we'll see what happens.

But it's been a productive play for us. I think Cincy is the one that challenged it. That wasn't a review. Correct me if I'm wrong. That was a challenge flag by Zac. Again, let's let Dennis and those guys try to figure out what we're going to do on short yardage on Sunday. But it's been a productive play.

I know you look around the league, I mean, you see it run a lot. You see them kind of try to -- it's interesting how they're officiating that play. I don't know how much I want to keep going because I don't want to get myself in trouble.

Q. With Aaron in there, if he's just standing in the backfield, he's not taking a defender with him, so the defense has --

ARTHUR SMITH: They may not cover. A lot of it depends where he is. If that defender is 10 yards back and a free safety, is he involved in that play 10 yards back if they play post high. They jam front, play post high, basically zero blitz. If that safety, Kevin Byard, is at 20 yards, is he making that play? So you could take him, and if they want to match you, you can take him and Aaron out, but they also could be standing where me and you are, and on that play they're not making the play.

If they go 11 up, you'd better -- whether we put Aaron back there or put Aaron right there, I've seen teams, and you

would have a counterpunch off of it. But we're one for one; it's just a math game. So if you're going to play back there where Kevin Byard is probably going to be on Sunday, and I'm Aaron or the quarterback, neither one of us are making that play. It's a good thought, but I'm also just saying that's the counterpoint to it.

Q. Darren talked about taking snaps because of his wrist. Are you thinking you're going to go more shotgun and that's just one example that because of his wrist you have to alter what you do? Is that hard, or do you --

ARTHUR SMITH: It just depends, again, on the communication. Certainly we've been in games where you have to adapt. We were in a game years ago as the play caller, and we had a guy that slightly pulled hamstring and we ran the whole offense out of the shotgun.

Again, that'll just be a conversation between Aaron and I. Those things are always on the table when you're dealing with certain things for sure.

Q. Aaron has had a lot of praise for Roman Wilson this year and his growth. He also points out where he comes up short like on the 3rd down at the end of the first half where he ran his route too quickly and didn't allow things to process and didn't get into the end zone with that. How do you as a play caller balance when you're trying to -- when your quarterback is trying to get your younger receivers to see what they need to see and decide in between simplifying things, giving them maybe less detailed routes or letting them kind of use their speed versus saying, hey, we need them to get that right in those moments?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, you go into what you're asking them and not you're asking a guy to have a lot of post-snap reads on a play. I don't know how many options you have. So if you have a young guy, and not just Roman, but just talking about hypothetically, certainly you've been at best with young players when you're asking teams if you're heavy post-snap read, will you have a lot of choices depending on what the coverage is playing. Yeah, that can drown some guys.

But I think what he was talking about was on a core route. So let's just take it case by case. But yeah, you're always evaluating that and how you're working guys. The good news is we've got a lot of guys in there who continue to come to work with the right mindset, and like I said, it's a continual process. We get about half a season, give or take, and when your objective is to win games and try to win a championship, that's stuff you've got to work on every day.

Q. Between you and Matt Baker and Ben Johnson, a number of guys from that 2005 UNC team now coaching, did you guys have any idea then that you would be in this position now?

ARTHUR SMITH: No. It's like a lot of businesses networking. Guys get their foot in the door is usually how most businesses work. I'm sure it's the same in y'all's industry in a lot of ways. At least getting a foot in the door, meet somebody. Yeah, it is kind of ironic. There's a couple guys in scouting, as well, and coaching in college. Yeah, I never thought that, no, to answer your question.

It'll be good to see Ben. Ben has done a great job. He's a good guy. There's a lot of players on that side, guys that I had in Atlanta. Grady Jarrett is one of my all-time favorites. Be good to see Grady. Drew Dalman, Kevin Byard, Tennessee, all those relationships.

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