

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. Aaron was talking the other day, just different factors involved, playing in cold weather, the ball on the field. As a play caller, does the cold weather factor in at all? When you have a quarterback that you know has been successful in cold weather, does that have any impact or factor into what you do?

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure, I think it certainly depends on who's playing quarterback. Our issues are not issues with weather. The same thing with it not only being cold, but sometimes when it snows, then the wind's been a factor a few times this year.

But in snow games, if it's nice outside and it's snowing, one of those bluer sky days, sometimes the passing game is better because the rush is slowed down. So we've seen that before.

Obviously Aaron's got a ton of experience playing in cold weather. He likes to play in the cold. He certainly threw the ball really well the other night.

Q. When you decided to go with the tush push, what made you think Connor Heyward was the best one to do that?

ARTHUR SMITH: Just trust. Connor obviously carried the ball and (indiscernible) quarterback. We tried a few guys out. We've just had a lot of faith in him. It's something we talked about in the off-season and worked it at different times, and we had enough from week 1.

I can't remember when we first called it, but just got faith in Connor.

Q. When you look at the Lions, they're in base defense more than anything else. When you look at game planning for a team that's like an outlier in the league, how much do you balance, okay, we do the packing really well, but we also might want to make them uncomfortable and do more personnel? How do you weigh that?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's the hard part every week when you're pulling personnel, they can change it up. When Miami won that game, probably a reaction of Baltimore and played a ton of shell early on, breaking their tendencies. You always have to have answers no matter what you call.

Certainly when you get into a team like Detroit, and they've done that, they can change it up Sunday afternoon for sure. When you have teams that one-up you, everyone goes base to 11, teams that go sub are big. Comically over the years, you see a lot of people screw up their run IDs when teams go sub. That's why, as you build your rules, if you're not a rigid thinker, I've seen that be an issue before.

Now you're talking about the one-up base, certainly how you want to attack in the run game because you don't want someone make you want to miss every time you go 11. If you've got base and you don't want to run it, you become one-dimensional, and you've got matchups in the zone. It all factors in. It's every week you're trying to play that game.

Q. Your numbers are quite good in throwing up the middle of the field last week against Miami. Hence your point, they played a lot of shell, the opportunity was there. Are you more willing now perhaps to use the middle of the field, even if it's not as much cover 2 shell, to throwing anything?

ARTHUR SMITH: It depends what scheme you're running. There are things I thought we've been close on, and we add it up every week, and sometimes things happen. Sometimes protection gets flushed or the window closes quick or whatever happens, and you progress on.

Then you're talking about in the action games you manipulate it, even if it's single high, really that's second level. They can be in single high, and they've got an aggressive group step up, there's a lot of time you get big plays off of that using the middle of the field. Post high defense, there's a lot of different things schematically and a lot of different things at times that early on in the year you don't give up on. You got to keep working on it and hopefully it pays off.



Some of the stuff we've worked that have added up with Jonnu have impacted that in Latrobe and the stuff I've done with him in Tennessee added up, and the right situation came up. Those things paid off. The play to DK, that's a core play. That's the first time in a while we've hit that look. Obviously Aaron made an unbelievable throw to fit that thing in there, and DK did the rest.

That's why it's so important that you keep a library and always looking at yourself and you're going back. What you've trained in, what you believe in, the long, slow, boring work pays off. That was good to see the other night as well.

Q. With the tush push, you called it four times on Monday. That's the most you've ever called it in a game. How much is because how much Connor has grown in that role and how well the offense is executing it?

ARTHUR SMITH: A little bit of both. We've had games recently -- it's the same thing in any situation. You fight this battle. You have too much in. You get in these games where you may not get one third-and-1 or one fourth-and-1 call, and then you get in a game like the other night where we kept getting in short yardage.

We've got a lot of faith in that play, especially when you've got two downs to get it. Yeah, that's the first time we've used it on the goal line, but those guys do a good job of it. They get excited when they get out there.

What's cool to see is when a guy like Connor goes and how fired up the other guys are, Darnell and Kenny.

Q. How important is that for you to be able to call that on the goal line, to get Connor a touchdown in that way?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, we thought it was the best call, and it just happened to be Connor. The one thing that showed up the other night too is how many people got involved. We got in some drives, hit some plays, got into a rhythm and it gave us more opportunities. We could get to more of that stuff or some of that stuff we had in the red zone. It was cool to see. A lot of people got involved, and guys stepped up.

Q. Kenny said yesterday, if it's third and two, he would just call it twice. What's your process?

ARTHUR SMITH: I've thought about it on fourth and three. I've thought about it -- I don't want to say publicly. Sorry, go back.

Q. I was going to say what's your process deciding when to use it and when not? You're certainly in the situations multiple times throughout every game.

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, it depends on how aggressive, like if you think you got two downs to go for it, if you want to be more aggressive on third and three maybe, or if you just want to go Caveman and use it -- we call it the Spartan play for Connor, whatever you want to call it, push play. If you want to go Spartan twice.

We've gotten sometimes three or four yards on that play. It's just calculate what you want to do if you know you've got two downs. If you're not sure you've got two downs, that could affect it as well. A lot of that stuff.

Q. Is that what you call it, the Spartan play?

ARTHUR SMITH: We call it the Spartan.

Q. Does Prisuta about this?

ARTHUR SMITH: I don't know. It's kind of the first time I publicly said that. We come up with funny names.

This is the funniest thing. Joe Gibbs told me this one time as a play caller, he said, I've spent more hours of my life trying to stay up late at night thinking what to call a play. I think the Internet helps now.

Dave Ragone and I used to joke about that in Atlanta. You want to keep things in families or whatever so it makes sense, but there's some funny names we come up with.

Q. What was Caveman?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's like when football started in the Ivy Leagues in the late 1800s, when they had 15 guys, it was like a rugby scrum. That's why I call it Caveman.

Q. What's the Kenny Gainwell strip play called?

ARTHUR SMITH: We call that one Yazoo for his hometown, Yazoo, Mississippi.

Q. Four touchdown drives this past game. What's that like for you? In a sense moving forward, how much confidence does that give you to call goofy named plays?

ARTHUR SMITH: You said goofy named plays?

Q. Yeah, Spartan, Caveman.



ARTHUR SMITH: (Indiscernible). It's like anything. You've just got to sustain drives. It's every week. Just got to do a good job. There's things early on we felt good about. Obviously they got us off the field. We stalled out, but we were very confident. Every game is not going to start perfect for you. We certainly have games, like New England came out hot and we stalled. That one we kind of got to, okay, build a touchdown every drive.

But we've got a lot of confidence. The thing that's key is just to keep working. I've said it all year, best teams there's a natural evolution. Injuries happen, things change, and you've just got to put your head down and keep working.

We're going to have a great challenge Sunday afternoon in Detroit. That's a tough place to play. It's a team that believes in the physicality, as we do. It will be a good heavyweight fight, and we're looking forward to the challenge.

Q. When we talked to DK yesterday, he said that when you guys were talking, he said there was an increase in communication during the week. He said it started around the middle of the season, especially around the Bills games, and we as an offense really sat down and talked and talked about you with him and with Aaron to help you guys get on, quote, unquote, the same page. What did you do as a coordinator maybe differently after the Bills game that might have helped find the rhythm you guys have found the last two games?

ARTHUR SMITH: Any time you get a new collective, every year you don't have the same cast of guys coming back. Core was from 19 to 20. So there's a lot of things. Just any business, the more communication you have, the better. We certainly communicate a ton.

I think the more you get to know people and the trust, just having real conversations. Maybe go old school, instead of getting on social media and send weird emojis and passive aggressive things, you just have a real conversation person to person, just the way it should be.

I love these guys. We've got a lot of good guys in there. All the guys want to do is win. The guys don't care who gets the credit. When you have a really good group of guys and a good staff, that's how it should function. Not this kind of, hey, I want credit when things are right, I don't want the blame when it's not.

We've got a lot of frail egos in this profession. We've got a lot of good guys. That's certainly what I believe. That's why I grew up studying guys like George Marshall, Jim Mattis, Ulysses Grant. I'm not really a Douglas MacArthur, George McClellan guy. Those are civil war buffs. We've

got a good group of guys. It's a shared experience. That's the way it should be.

Q. How much is also taking their ideas and trying to mesh those with your own and that challenge of, hey, I have this vision for the offense, but these are the guys that I'm working with?

ARTHUR SMITH: All I can tell you is you can just when you listen to people, you can see who the me guys are, and that's kind of the point I was making. I've never been a part of that. I never believed that. I was never raised that way.

Any staff I've been on, Tennessee, Atlanta, I think as a young coach you try to get better. I would ask London Fletcher things about presentation on defensive quality control. If you listen and you've got some humility, you're always there. When everybody's hurt, ultimately you've got to make decisions. Obviously the quarterback makes the decision where the ball goes, but when you have that shared accountability and group you trust, you don't get the passive aggressive drama. You just give real people that gives you a chance, and you certainly need to keep that going.

We're going to have another challenge Sunday, and we need to be stacking these wins so we can play more in January and keep it rolling.

Q. If Dylan has to be one-on-one with Hutchinson, he can handle it, or how much of an agenda is it to help him in those situations?

ARTHUR SMITH: I help all those guys on any play depending what they do. Everyone is going to have a hard job, but that's kind of the things they have to say and things you work around. I always try to protect those guys up front. They've done a helluva job this year. Dylan, like Rob did last year, his two games, he played against the better interior guys. You never want to leave those guys out to dry, set a set of drop-backs and say, here you go, buddy, you're on your own. I don't care who you are. Dylan did a fantastic job, as all those guys have done all year.

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