

# Pittsburgh Steelers

## Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

### Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



**Q. Is there a reason Gainwell and Warren have been the one-two punch to the degree that they have?**

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, it did. Just some of the things we saw just in the spring watching Kenny from afar, how to best use him and Jaylen. So we started working a lot of that what we call a fast hole-in-one package back in the spring. It just kind of evolved. You've just got to see those things on film, and then you work with them. There's a lot of trust in both those players.

**Q. What you see on film, when did you start to realize how smart of a player Kenny is, football IQ, touchdown catches? There's things you can't really know about a guy --**

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, until they get on the ground with you. Pretty early on in OTAs. In OTAs you like to try a lot of things and there's no consequences then. You try to push guys. Some guys you try to expand the route tree, whatever it is, new player, run this on film, see what it looks like.

Then obviously in camp just the work those guys have put in with the quarterbacks.

**Q. It seems like you've always wanted the versatile and hybrid players. What are some of the advantages of those guys, maybe some of the unseen or the things below the layers you might not think about? Ways that those guys are helpful**

ARTHUR SMITH: I just think, I mean, week to week there's man matchups. I think that was a perfect example, the play that Aaron made to Kenny before the half. You're in a situation right there in front of the field goal, got a timeout in your pocket, you can't waste too much time if you want to take a shot. I know Boswell said he could have kicked it from the 45, and he probably could. You're in a situational thing.

But those are things that are built from all the things in

practice and things you talk about offensively and the players, and we've got players that are smart, they have initiative. We've done a lot with Kenny and Jaylen, but another way to look at Kenny, understanding protections and the gains within the gains of protection, going from six-man to five-man. Those are the chess matches you play on third down. We really use it as a man indicator or we do something else with it. We get into a six man, or we're getting out of a six man.

To be able to do that, to flood him out, obviously Aaron sees a man, he gets a matchup on Anzalone, and that was a trust play in all regards. That was one of the most spectacular plays that I've seen live. Obviously I couldn't see from my angle that he caught it, but the way he popped up, I said from upstairs, damn, he caught that thing. Great play.

Even just the logistics of it because, when you do all that, it's not just two guys. You've got to understand that you've got to have a smart center and linemen when you operate that way. For them to make the call and for all 11 to be on the same page because you could do that stuff, but if you're not in sync up front, you cut a guy loose and you get sacked. There's just a lot to go.

That was a cool moment just with all those guys when you praise their initiative and we have smart players.

**Q. What's the impact of not having DK? How do you make up for that loss?**

ARTHUR SMITH: Any time you lose a starter for whatever reason, you adapt, but that's your job. You see it unfortunately week to week. That's why it's so important. There's plenty of examples of guys stepping up in game or throughout the week. Dylan is a good example. We've had a lot of guys like that that have done that. Pete, Scotty in the game, Calvin goes down.

I was joking. It was Scotty for three years, when Scotty's number is called, he's going to make a play. I still think the most impressive thing Scotty did last year was in week 1 when he had to go on there, he covered a punt, made the tackle, had the hold at the end of the game down in Atlanta, fourth and two, the fade that the quarterback has

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and a guy like Scotty who didn't get a ton of reps, his number is called, makes a huge catch, another one the sideline. That's cool to see, but that's really the whole collective unit, why it's so important every day. You work the entire roster.

This week guys' roles are changed, and we've got to figure out a way to beat a really good Cleveland defense.

**Q. You've always been a guy to spread the ball around to different receivers. You have 10 guys with touchdown catches this year. Does that help when you get into a situation where suddenly your No. 1 wide receiver is unavailable?**

ARTHUR SMITH: Absolutely. Everybody's got different philosophies. In my judgment, no way is better than the other. It also matches with Aaron's philosophy. He's talked a million times about distributing the ball. Different guys are different. It doesn't make it better one way or the other.

I definitely think, it's like anything, when a lot of guys touch the football earlier they get one through the hoop, to use a basketball analogy, they think they're alive. They don't feel like they're stand-ins. It's just an isolation offense. It doesn't mean you don't miss a certain player at all, but it's their job, and those guys find a way.

That's why it's always a great challenge week in and week out, any division game you play in no matter where it is during the season, and they've done a good job all year of defense. We're looking forward to that challenge.

**Q. Aaron's made it very clear over the past few months the importance of timing, spacing, and that connection with the whole receivers and everyone's route even when you're not the primary or secondary option. With that being in mind MVS, Adam Thielen, they've both been a big part of that. Who takes on DK's role as far as the routes that are run and the concepts that are called? Is that an MVS job? Is it Miller? Is that an Adam job with his experience? What do you guys do?**

ARTHUR SMITH: We have a lot of options on the table. I appreciate the question, it's a good question, but a lot of it I don't want to give strategy. We'll clearly figure that out, put a plan in.

A lot of times where there's a player -- you know, when Isaac's been down and we don't want to get out of our heavy package, it's been unconventional, but it's worked. We've had guys that have stepped in and played guard and understand the rules they make have to stay in or get

out after we get reports. It's a shared effort. We put the best plan we can in.

All that matters is try to win that game. How we do it, there's a lot of different ways we can do it, but we've got to play really good football, and we've got to continue to play as we get into January.

**Q. I know that Roman Wilson has been a healthy scratch the last couple weeks. How have you seen him kind of respond in practice? What are you looking for him this week with a potential increase in his role?**

ARTHUR SMITH: Roman's played a good amount of time this year. A lot of decisions are made that's not necessarily a detriment. You give another guy an opportunity, and some times it goes down to fourth or fifth option. If it's past the five, it goes down to special teams. Sometimes it's not just receiver comparison, it's the big picture when they fit into that puzzle on game day.

Roman is a tough minded player. He continues to work hard. When his number's called, I'm sure he'll be ready.

**Q. When you've been on the sidelines during games, how often have you heard fans take it too far, yelling and things like that?**

ARTHUR SMITH: I try not to pay attention to that. I don't really worry about that. No matter what the circumstance is, you've got crowd noise or it's a snow game, your job, you've got to be focused on the job at hand.

**Q. The last three games your offense has averaged 28 points. How could you be effective and continue to score against a very tough Cleveland Browns defense?**

ARTHUR SMITH: Every week there's a challenge. I don't care what the stats are going into a game. If you don't play well, you do things that are in your control presnap, play sloppy, it doesn't matter who you're playing. You make it harder on yourself.

History and experience tells you you can play the '85 Bears on defense or you can play a Pop Warner defense, you've got to play well. That's the focus is improving every week. Great we scored 28 points, I forget how many points we had the first time we played them, our job it to win the game -- first and foremost we've got to win a score almost every possession. We've got to find a way to win the game, and that's all that matters.

**Q. What are your keys to getting there?**

ARTHUR SMITH: Same keys there are every week. Got to play well, got to execute the keys that you have set out. Sometimes you've got to change technique. There's a lot of planning that goes into it. Don't beat yourself. Usually you can start there -- presnap penalties or taking unnecessary negative plays. Defense always has a say when you make a play, but when you have self-inflicted wounds, it doesn't matter when you play, preparation has to be regardless, whatever scenario you're in, every week in this league, you'd better bring it, and you'd better focus on improving yourself and understanding the plan.

That's what we try to accomplish. I'd like to think that really the buildup has been the journey regardless of what's going on outside to improve so you're playing your best football down here.

We've got a great challenge on Sunday, and we're looking forward to that.

**Q. A couple months ago, Garrett didn't have a sack or a tackle off the ball. Is there anything you take from that game that you can apply?**

ARTHUR SMITH: Situations change. He did a good job of staying ahead and on track. He's a great player. He's another player that probably, just because he was a top pick -- sometimes I laugh at people just planning things on talent. You've watched his game evolve. He's seen every scheme thrown at him. You've watched the evolution of his career, I've seen it. At times I've been on the other sideline against him, he does a phenomenal job. Everybody tries to chip him. They try to do things away from him.

I think, when a guy gets to that point in his career and they try to help on the protections and watching how he plays it, he's a problem. That's the highest compliment I can give him. We've got a lot of respect, but our job is to block him, and there's 10 other guys out there that do a helluva job too. They rush really well. They cover. They're aggressive. We enjoy the challenge just like it was the first game, and we've got to play our best football.

**Q. You guys have used more 11-personnel spread looks over the last three or four games, how much of that is trust in the wide receiver with MVS having more playing time versus matchup stuff maybe you saw specifically?**

ARTHUR SMITH: It's a little of both. A lot of it is with any personnel you put out there, it's what you're trying to accomplish, it doesn't give you an advantage. We've got a lot of guys, certainly we have two veterans that earn your trust quick. It certainly helps. But that's the plan.

Then the situations in the games change. If you're in a hurry-up, if you get more two-minute drives, naturally you give them more than 11. There's always context in everything.

You just look at how the pendulum swings in the NFL, you look at a team like the Rams, I think they played 50 snaps in 13 personnel. A couple of years ago they were in 11. Everybody told you, though, this is the new wave in football. What's old is new again. It's like life.

But we've got to do what's best for you, your team, and does it give you the advantage of what you're trying to accomplish?

**Q. With Ben Skowronek going to the Pro Bowl as a rookie --**

ARTHUR SMITH: Oh, he's told everybody.

(Laughter.)

**Q. -- with Danny's unit and he hasn't been involved as much offensively, but is he just wired a little differently than all the receivers you've been around over the years?**

ARTHUR SMITH: Roman, in all honesty, he had that injury -- no, Ben's been a big part of the offense. He's a good football player. But anybody that can impact a game -- I mean, it's a total team game. Sometimes that's just the way it goes, as you compare stats and everybody.

There's a monetary incentive, I get it. There's nothing wrong with that. The great teams understand how to play in all three phases together. Ben is a guy that's helped us on offense. He's made some big plays. Even without the football, he's helped us.

It's cool to see. He's a guy that's worked hard in this league. He's a fun character to be around. He's a man of many talents. He's a pastry chef. He baked Aaron a cake. Ben's got a lot of talents. Maybe he can monetize that off the field.

**Q. We talked often about the offensive line this week. Troy Fautanu is going good. There's a lot of plays for Pat Meyer and how he's challenged them as individuals, duos, and then the full team. How do you guys coordinate as a coaching staff in the improvement of a young offensive line?**

ARTHUR SMITH: I think that's everything. Again, it goes back to this. It's never about one player. When you want

to be great, you need to use all resources, and any leadership position, things that I believe in, in terms of guys and our staff, they do a helluva job, and our players do too, you need that. You need that chemistry. You need guys you can trust. That's how you don't get stale.

I don't believe in destined leadership, like Bud Kilmer. But any high functioning organization, if you want to stay relevant, Pat is a guy I've really enjoyed working with, but we've got a great staff. Isaac and Mateo do a great job in that room, and there's a lot of hours spent, players and coaches. If you want to be great, you need to have a great team, and we do.

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