

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. Art, you had the fourth and one and then you also had a third and one midfield, turned into a third and six. Can you walk us through the whens and the whys of why you do the Tush Push and when you keep your regular personnel out there?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I mean, the first one, if you remember, we took a timeout and we had called for it. Then there was a timeout, you know, so tried to be a little more aggressive. We had talked it through, so obviously didn't work in our favor.

But, yeah, those are the discussions as we come over there, because we had taken the timeout. And then the third and one we were in hurry-up and obviously got called for the false start.

But I get it. This is the first time I talk and it's several days after the game. But that was kind of the story of the game. I mean, we had way too self-inflicted wounds for many reasons. Had plenty of opportunities. You got to give Cleveland credit.

But that's really what went on. I mean, you move the ball and then some of the situational stuff; we had too many negative plays when we were on track or field position after big plays and we didn't overcome it.

But that's why you got to -- those are every week, tough lessons learned whether you win or lose. The reality is we have a huge opportunity and big game Sunday night.

Q. Does not having Darnell impact the decision to use the Tush Push or Spartan play at all?

ARTHUR SMITH: You got backups for all that, so just live with the consequences. I mean, you call things. I mean, we had our third counterpunch off that we had used earlier in the game, the one that Connor got 29 yards on. He's done a terrific job with that stuff.

Yeah, there is risk in every play call and strategy, and if it

works in your favor you look back on those things. That's every week whether you win or lose.

Q. You say you have backups. Darnell is obviously a unique human being.

ARTHUR SMITH: He is.

Q. Is it just plug next man up, or is it like Connor Heyward, Darnell Washington, both tight ends, you know what I'm saying?

ARTHUR SMITH: Absolutely. But if you want to continue to use things you have to have contingency plans, so not going to give away what that is. We'll have something different from Baltimore. I'm sure they'll show us some new things Sunday.

Yeah, you have to have contingency plans. There are certain things -- you lose two guys you're out of certain things for sure. But that's what happens when you get injuries in games or guys go out. Not trying to make it too complicated. Sometimes it's one for one or sometimes you got to move two guys. There was a lot of that going on during the game.

But that's every week. You better have those plans.

Q. With what the Ravens did last time attacking down the field against man coverage and seeing that they've gone more zone since then, but then you guys didn't do so well against man coverage last week, do you feel like the Ravens are just going to be...

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, I think you take it in. Obviously the results are what they are, but first thing -- I mean, the easy part is to say, oh, it was just man is why. You know, you look at things schematically with guys getting open, yes; there are multiple reasons sometimes.

I mean, Cleveland does a terrific job. You don't see a lot of people getting to No. 2 or whatever. I mean, they've done it all year. It's not just Myles. Got to give that whole defense a lot of credit, which they don't get, but they should. It's a very, very violent pass rush.



All year you don't see a lot of people holding that football against Cleveland, so that's some of it. Second, third down we had of the game, second one to Calvin we had the OPI. We had a scheme and it's a subjective call and big play to Scotty.

There were a couple other things. You take the one-on-one in that fourth and one where we had an inside rub, but I hate sometimes going to this because it sounds like it's excuses, but that's the game we play.

Sometimes it's man. It's not always one-on-ones outside. People do all those things. They try to show man alignments, give you zone, bailout. Baltimore does it every defense. It's kind of dime a dozen now in the NFL.

And every week, you know, third down, a lot of people like to play numbers and this is what they do. When you get veteran quarterbacks and got guys like Aaron, every week third down has been a Rolodex, and that's just what it is, their strategy against different quarterbacks, and that's a credit to him. And then be the same thing Sunday night against Baltimore.

Q. Art, the attempt to replace No. 4, is that a failure or progress made?

ARTHUR SMITH: Depends on what you define as failure. If you define failure as we didn't win the game, yes.

Q. From your perspective.

ARTHUR SMITH: My perspective, the guys stepped up in different ways. Goes back to your question. Sometimes it's not one for one. The results are what they are, but we had guys get open, we didn't make a play, and that's really the story the first two games. Look at the first Cleveland game we made a couple big plays and obviously DK did some good one-on-ones.

The issue wasn't moving the ball. The issue was when we got in that fringe and scoring we found different ways. Again, sounds like excuses and I don't want take anything from Cleveland, but that's really what happened. All it would've taken was a couple plays in that game we didn't make.

You see that in divisional games all the time. Look at Cincinnati the first time they played Baltimore on Thanksgiving and then they got shutout.

Divisional games are really every week in the NFL. You got to make the plays when they're there, and when you don't, you always look at things schematically if you want to define it as failure or not. But I think the guys did try to

execute, tried to find different ways to replace that when it's not necessarily just one for one, if that makes sense to you.

Q. Coach, what are you looking for in the (indiscernible) situations?

ARTHUR SMITH: You talking about the end of the game?

Q. Yeah.

ARTHUR SMITH: You got no timeouts. Obviously trying to score. We got to that second and 7 so we hit 3 to 7. Still enough time. If something was underneath, you could get another play off if your logistics are right, but different ways.

It was man coverage again, and couple things, different things happened. The last one I thought he had a good look. I thought Quez ran a good route. Result didn't go our way.

Q. Coach, last game you only had 34 yards rushing. What would you --

ARTHUR SMITH: Talking about Baltimore?

Q. Yes, last game against Baltimore. You been running the ball better.

ARTHUR SMITH: Correct.

Q. However, what can you do with this game to do a lot better running the ball?

ARTHUR SMITH: Depends, again, back to the subjective. Do you feel like that was a failure when you win the game and only have 34 yards?

Q. Well...

ARTHUR SMITH: I'm just putting these hypotheticals out there. Here's what I'm saying. We didn't come out trying to run the ball a lot. We did run it okay at times and then a lot of it you can take the stats and cut them up how you want. A lot are situational; short yardage that we converted a lot of, right? We had the red zone run.

Again, there is always things you can be better at. Yeah, you would love to run it, consistently close the game out, those type of things. It will be a different strategy Sunday night and we'll let Baltimore figure that out.

But we came out of that game very aggressive, pushing the ball down the field. They'll have a different defensive

plan. We'll have a different offensive plan. But every week you want to be balanced and like to run the ball well.

So, again, I'm not going to give away our strategy...

Q. Just as a follow up, I asked that question because they're expecting you to run. (Regarding DK Metcalf.)

ARTHUR SMITH: Maybe. Maybe. I'm just saying. There is a lot of things that can go on, a lot of variables. I always appreciate the questions because you guys want answers to things, but sometimes I just don't think it's a smart strategy to give what we're going to do on Saturday. When Zach talks he's not going to give away their third down plan or any new front or coverages they want to deploy.

Q. Without giving too much away, is this a burn-the-boats type of week with the game plan?

ARTHUR SMITH: You would like to -- you know, sure. Anytime you're looking at it's a playoff game for us. Our playoffs start a week earlier, and that's another way to look at it. It's always an interesting case of human psychology, because you know, people start looking at the future and whatever, but week to week you need to have that mentality, that focus, and that's what you're all trying to strive for.

It's about being in the present and understanding that anything can happen. I mean, you lose Darnell one play, so you never know what can happen. Could be your last play or whatnot. But we know this is a playoff game. Obviously the intensity is high every week in the NFL, but it's -- it'll be a great atmosphere. Doesn't get bigger than this: Sunday Night Football, last game of the regular season, Ravens-Steelers.

Q. You guys drew up a lot of concepts where it seemed like Thielen and Friermuth were playing off each other, trying to create conflicts the middle of the defense, but it seemed like the time Aaron really went after it was in the no huddle on the fourth and 1...

ARTHUR SMITH: Some of it. Some is coverage. They gave us two man so the middle field is open so coverage dictates that, too.

Q. Are those situations where you want that to be a primary read?

ARTHUR SMITH: Goes back to the coverage, what coverage you plays. I'm not trying to be smart alec, but that's usually what happens. They're playing in two high and trying to play man underneath and middle of the field is open. Defender has got to -- don't want to get beat inside.

Pat made a hell of a move. Hit the big play down the middle because it's split safety and the man underneath, so that's where the ball went.

Some of them when you get post eye the ball goes outside, or like I said, the play we had to Scotty came from inside and he was a two and we were down the sideline. So a lot of ways to attack it. A lot of time the coverage dictates the read, too. Same thing when they pop out and Scotty had a big conversion to adjust the zone. They're trying to show man, and those are the games everybody plays on third down.

Q. Art, you guys used more gap front this year, things like that. What about your personnel or defensive meta that has allowed you guys to lean into that?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I think a lot of it is with your personnel. All our guys pull pretty well, play in space; that helps. You don't want to get stale. Sometimes you go back to the basics. Two runs were zone schemes, kind of core plays.

Sometimes what's old is new again. We ran a day one install play that cut the defense in half and Jaylen with Connor in the eye that went for a big play. Then went back to the edge off the wing for the other one that went -- so it's a mix and match and some is what they're playing schematically. You try to evolve. We got guys that have a lot of size up front but also play in space well.

Q. Aaron was saying yesterday you look at his career he doesn't have stinkers back to back. What does his experience bring to this prep and matchup coming off a bad game and into a winner?

ARTHUR SMITH: There is not many people that play the quarterback position like Aaron Rodgers. Look at that game Sunday. You've seen it all season regardless of the score. You're never out of the fight with him at quarterback. Obviously the thing wasn't going our way. A lot of chances at the end to win the game.

I think you see a lot when you get in those moments. He gets the ball back, obviously there is initial disappointment when we didn't get it on that four and out. But we still had life and I've watched him now do that up close, did it in New York week one, did it in Cincinnati shootout we got in the first Cincy game.

I mean, again, the ball was then in the air 70 yards. Almost saw another Hail Mary on Thursday night. He's a special player. That's all I can say. So we got to play our best football. Got a lot of faith and we'll get Baltimore's best so looking forward to that challenge.



