

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

Thursday, January 8, 2026
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. Art, can you go back and just kind of break down that last play, you know, the call, the signals that are involved in the call, and how that all just kind of transpired?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah. I mean, there was a lot going on the last two drives, but we were in a third down situation and, you know, really in a hurry up, I mean, we still had plenty of time. Knowing it was third and ten, you got two downs. So we were in a third down call, like a lot of the things we build in, and Aaron does a terrific job with the protections and different mechanisms.

And it's not just -- you guys have asked a bunch about that. Like every year you're trying to build in when you got smart players like we do that can adjust, and he does as good a job and has, you know, last 20 years.

So it was a third down call. As he told Calvin, we were looking for a double move. We tried one, two plays before. He got the matchup he wanted. Told Calvin in so many words to run it.

He made a terrific throw and Calvin was a great route. Just a big time moment. I think that situation also helped, too, because corner was so far off. Knowing that the situation you got two downs, I mean, you're at the got-to-have-it moment. And it was a cool thing to watch.

The whole last fourth quarter was awesome. Just those guys kept chipping away and found a way.

Q. Was that the same play you threw to Scotty Miller on the fourth and one previously?

ARTHUR SMITH: No, that was different. The one to Calvin, they're individual routes, different concepts inside. We were spread out more on a third down, kind of a core third down concept and it was just an individual route.

The one with Scotty was just a go. Different situation on the fourth and one. We had a pick inside. So a little bit

different.

Q. Art, the similar scenario in trait on the Gainwell play where you...

ARTHUR SMITH: No that was one a little bit...

Q. Aaron said something like go...

ARTHUR SMITH: No, not necessarily. The one with different scheme, they're a completely different situation. That one it was just something with the protection and he saw it and had the matchup, but it just goes back to more than that.

I don't -- you know, Aaron and I, you know, spend a lot of time together. Here is what I can tell you.

Q. How much? Is that pretty rare in season?

ARTHUR SMITH: How much?

Q. Does it come up every once in a while?

ARTHUR SMITH: Depends who you got playing quarterback and what kind of skill players you have. It's not just the skill players. A lot of people try, most offenses, and certainly I've done it. I've have had a million different quarterbacks.

It's the way that -- it's a combination of a lot of things and a lot of -- and that's why this is the ultimate team game and people forget that sometimes.

Because the line doesn't get enough credit, and you never do as linemen. Not that I have a soft spot for the line or anything. In all seriousness, the stress -- when you're able to do that -- and no different than a defense, they formation check, you can throw motion or bunch, what's your call? Stack, how you going to play it? Three. Press the point. That's the same communication, and that's why the NFL is so different and the appreciation I have for smart players, mike linebackers, formations checks, whatever it is, but you got to change the protection.

Again, it's chaos if everybody is not on the same page. In

the moment those come up and those are things they worked and that is a credit to Aaron and the way -- it's all logistics. To understand that is you go from a six-man protection to a five-man protection, it changes your call. And you can change the protection as well.

And if everybody is not on the same -- that play clock is going, so he identifies the defense and that's the chemistry that Aaron had with Kenny and he does it with Jaylen. They've done a great job.

That's the cat-and-mouse game you play on third down and situational football like that and those guys have done a hell of a job all year. It's all 11 are involved. They things they've worked on, the long hours and the reps, boring repetitions that go on in training camp and the season, and it pays off in big moments and it's a credit to those guys, and a lot of them.

And both of them were spectacular plays.

Q. You mentioned that it was really cool to see the fourth quarter, just the way the offense was playing. What does it do now for this group to add DK Metcalf back into the mix, especially going off just all the things that were working in that fourth quarter against the Ravens?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, it's such a long, you know, game. I mean, obviously you would like to start quicker, but you go in, and as you adjust things and we're very confident. We missed a couple things the first half and obviously took that risk before the half.

It just shows the mental toughness I've been talking about with these guys. When you're going into halftime there is no panic. We felt confident about the plan and strategy we had. Said, hey, we're not getting out of the run game. We didn't have that many runs in the first half. We did it ourselves and Baltimore did a good job. They held the ball more and then the second half kind of flipped it and stayed with the run, and guys grinded it out.

And then you just saw the finish. I mean, that was the cool part, whether it was on the screen to Fraz, blocking in space, some of the runs, the finish by Jaylen, guys down the field. It was a heavyweight fight, and it was -- luckily it worked out on our side.

It was a hell of a drama for a week 18 regular season game.

Q. Adding DK Metcalf to that group, how does that elevate the offense?

ARTHUR SMITH: I mean, every week is a different story, but obviously getting DK back is -- it's like any time you get one of your best players back, it certainly helps.

That was the thinking going in. Again, it goes back to those guys. You look at -- you know, Aaron said it and it's true. We kind of embrace that. We got a bunch of castoffs or guys what are has-been, and we embrace that and these guys fight. It's a gritty group and cool to see the ball go to nine different guys.

Guys have stepped up: Scotty, Thielen, Quez, Calvin, Pat, all those guys; Jonnu, Connor, Cam now on offense. So it's fun to watch.

Q. You had three third down conversions where you threw the ball well beyond the chains to advance the sticks. Calvin, Muth, and then the MVS catch as well. Because you've had success at that, DK is coming back, you're in the playoffs now. The line is protecting pretty well. Are you more inclined to do that more often now because --

ARTHUR SMITH: We always have that option. It's just getting -- what's the coverage? That's the thing. Sometimes if they're in pressure, you know, if he don't give you the one on ones you have to have other options.

It's not -- put this way: I guess philosophically say we've never been opposed to taking that risk. There is risk in every call. You get the matchups, you know, you take them, and that's the initiative.

When you've got guys like Aaron and those guys and they have a lot of trust, and you can't get upset when they don't work. If you want to embrace initiative, you got to take the good and the bad. Otherwise, you're just going to become hesitant or get sideways as a unit.

Again, it's just how they want to deploy their defense. We're playing great defense. Any time you get in a playoff game, you know, the way Houston is built, they've done a hell of a job. You talk about a good philosophical approach, the way they built that roster, the defense, the way DeMeco's vision and Matt Burke, you see it on all sides. They play well together. They got two good corners.

So those matchups will be going on all game.

Q. Going off that, when you're looking at this defense and you said they're number two in points, number one in yards, but they're in the bottom half of the league in pass explosive rates and in deep balls allowed and deep yards allowed. What do you guys

have it to do while being mindful of their pass rush?

ARTHUR SMITH: You can chop up stats however you want. Hey, look, they're 31st in goal to go. They're also top in points. So it's just sample size is statistics; some matter more than others.

Week after week they've won. They've struggled along in a lot of games. Talk about a team that's overcome adversity. They started kind of in the hole there and they play well together.

That's the challenge. It's good on good, as it is every week. We're excited about this matchup. So that's -- you know, you got a little more time. This will be the first time I've been involved in a Monday night playoff game, but we're excited about it.

Q. You've never had a running back lead your team in receptions before as far as I can tell.

ARTHUR SMITH: No.

Q. I doubt you were thinking we're going to throw the ball to Kenny Gainwell 75 times this year. How did that process play out, that he ended up becoming such a key part of your receiving game?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think we identified early on we've got a lot of catch-and-run guys and the backs are a big part of it. You know that, and, again, talking about strategy when you're adding personnel, and even sometimes the way people play you, you know, things go in trends. A lot of shell defense has been played trying to take away deep things. You got guys that can take flat routes and make them into explosives or catch-and-runs.

It certainly helps you, helps your protection. So Kenny, as that role has evolved, again, I've had a lot of different kind of players. That's your job, is to try to mesh it together and highlight guys and enhance it. Kenny has done a phenomenal job and so has Jaylen.

Q. Of course you want to try to score every possession.

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure.

Q. First possession of the game, the first four, the first couple, is there a priority on that or is it more of the weighty moments and the scripting the whole thing? How important is it to get off to a fast start?

ARTHUR SMITH: I mean, every week, it's like you hear the announcer say got to -- need to get off to a fast start.

It's kind of the no, whatever. I don't think anybody has ever -- never been a part of a meeting since I was a nine year playing football, hey, let's start slow and ease into this one and not be physical.

Having said that, you know, some of it is -- it's usually that play. I mean, strategically sometimes it's converting the first third down and you get to a third down early. You know, again, starting that game out, coming -- and sometimes it's just small details that make a play successful or not.

Yeah, I mean, we would like to start every game like we did in New England or the first Baltimore game. That's a priority we work towards every week.

Q. What's made you guys better on third down in two of the last three?

ARTHUR SMITH: I mean, some of them were just -- you know, again, we had a couple drops the week before. You know, one was underneath the sticks so you don't know how it plays out, but you felt pretty good about it.

And then we got called for an OPI. That's kind of what happened. You look at what you're doing, are guys getting open. We know what we're doing, the protection is good, all that stuff factors into it.

You know, I mean, that is a stat. It's hard to overcome if you -- against any defense, but especially a defense like this. If half your third downs are third and eight plus, you know, the odds are against you.

They do a good job of getting people off track on first down, and that's kind of where they win in the margins there. They don't turn the ball over. They get turnovers. I think that's most people's philosophy. That turnover stat usually holds up. They played well as a football team because of it.

Q. There are reports out there that Titans have reached out, submitted a request to speak to you about the head coaching position. Is that the case?

ARTHUR SMITH: I mean, I was just informed of it, but here is the thing: The NFL cycle is what it is. You're obviously appreciative of somebody, but that's not something I'm going to focus on, because the only thing that matters is my current job.

It's like try to tell people all the time, live in the present. If you have perspective and life experiences you're wasting time worrying about the future. You deal with that just like anything. In the offseason you deal with it. Anything like

that is a distraction, so all my focus is on our guys, these guys, and anything I take away from that is not doing my job.

So all I care about is the Steelers and our players.

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