

Fox Sports NFL

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Stephen A. Smith

Troy Aikman



STEPHEN A. SMITH: Joining us now, a Hall of Famer, a three-time Super Bowl champion-winning quarterback with the Dallas Cowboys, also a lead analyst for the NFL on Fox and will be on the call for the NFC Championship Game between the Green Bay Packers and Tampa Bay Buccaneers this weekend. Let's bring in the one and only Troy Aikman.

Troy, how you doing? How is everything? Yes, a Dallas Cowboy is on my show, and I have no problem with it. How are you doing, man? How are you doing?

TROY AIKMAN: Stephen A, I'm doing great. Thanks for having me.

STEPHEN A. SMITH: Thanks for being here. Let's get right to it. This is a big-time matchup, Tom Brady, Aaron Rodgers, Tampa Bay versus Green Bay. You'll be calling that game. Talk to me about what you think the keys to this contest are this weekend.

TROY AIKMAN: Stephen A, the reason these teams are in this game is because they're both playing with a lot of confidence and playing really good football. Especially Tampa Bay, this is the best they've played all season long. And what Green Bay's been able to do, coming off the big win against the Rams.

I think this game, like so many playoff games, and it and sounds pretty cliché, it's who is able to protect the football. I know Jimmy Johnson used to say to us before big games like this, it's not who makes the most big plays; it's who make the fewest bad plays.

You go back to week-six matchup between these two teams, Tampa Bay was able to run Green Bay out of the stadium early in that game primarily because of the turnovers and interceptions that Aaron Rodgers had. And that's something that he doesn't do very often. So, I expect this to be a really good football game.

STEPHEN A. SMITH: When I look at the Green Bay Packers, one thing I saw watching them -- because we all know the Rams defense was big time, but I just watched Aaron Rodgers. The chemistry with Davante Adams and how glowingly he speaks about that guy. They've got a

running game, Scantling along with Lazard and others. He seems to have the necessary weapons. How do you feel about his supporting cast this year compared to last year?

TROY AIKMAN: Well, I think these players have really grown this year. And I think it's a group, outside of Davante Adams, that has not gotten their due, quite honestly, Stephen A. You've said it. I think what Allen Lazard, he missed a lot this season, but when he's been healthy, he's a good player. They are different types of receivers. These are big receivers that can run. And they can do some things.

And then Davante Adams could do anything he wants. He can get down the field. He can get open in the slot. He's got it all. But as you mentioned, I think one of the real keys for them -- it was the key to our success back when I was playing -- is they can play whatever game you want them to play.

If you're going to play coverage, like the Rams did last week, they're able to run the football. If you come up and try to play the run, then they have the big-play ability down the field. So, it really puts the defense in a quandary.

STEPHEN A. SMITH: Transition a little bit to Tom Brady from this perspective. Your last year in the league, if I remember correctly, you were 34 years old. This man is 43. And he's got them in the NFC Championship Game his first year out of New England. How do you put into words, in terms of your perspective, what Tom Brady has done?

TROY AIKMAN: And what's interesting -- and I think you could say it about both these quarterbacks -- there was a time where it was really basketball where you could bring in a LeBron James, a Kobe Bryant and go to the NBA Finals. In football it wasn't totally like that. And I don't think it totally is.

But it really does -- I think when you consider what Tom Brady has done for Tampa and him going there, and just the confidence that he has permeated throughout that building, I think is huge. He's just raised the expectations and the level of play of all of those players around him.



And as this season has gone along, he was getting hit a lot. And I didn't feel that he had the outlets that he had in New England when he was under pressure and his ability to get the ball out of his hands.

And I think that over the course of the season, they've given him more of those opportunities, and so now he has outlets. He has places to go with the football. He doesn't turn it over. He doesn't take sacks. But it hasn't taken away their ability for the big plays. They're still the best in the game. And that's something that Bruce Arians, of course, has been known for throughout his coaching career.

STEPHEN A. SMITH: Now, Troy, don't laugh at me for saying this, because I never played football. And obviously I don't like to get hit. I never played football. But I will say this to you. Not only do I not want to get hit, Troy Aikman, I wouldn't want to get hit in cold weather. I believe that going to Lambeau Field in Wisconsin, it could be very detrimental for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers because you're used to being in Florida and now you're going to Lambeau Field in January. You combine that, Antonio Brown, we're learning he's probably not going to be playing this game because of the knee injury he sustained. How much of a disadvantage does that put Tampa at for this game?

TROY AIKMAN: I think it is a factor. I do agree with that. And I also know Aaron Rodgers and the Packers -- I mean, no one likes playing in the cold. I think Rodgers has talked about how he likes playing at home. There's a lot that goes into that.

Of course, you've got the fans. Typically -- they're going to have about 8500 there for this game. But the Packers believe that they have an advantage. And I think that they do. I think in this year of the pandemic it's the only real home-field advantage any team might have is the weather.

But considering that Tom Brady played in New England. He's accustomed. A lot of times when you get these warm-weather teams, they don't really know what to wear in the cold, Stephen A. So, there's a bit of a trial; whereas, the Packers, they practice in it. They're in it each week this time of year. They know exactly what they need to wear. Rodgers knows exactly what's going to work for him.

But Brady does as well. And the real key then is being able to keep your hands warm at the skill-player positions. And so I don't see this being as big of a factor as what you would generally look at when you see a team coming from Florida having to go play in the Midwest.

STEPHEN A. SMITH: I want to get you on the record -- I want to get you on the record here. Are you saying that

thermal underwear and thermal socks, that might not be good enough at Lambeau Field? You've got to know specifically what to wear; is that what you're telling me, Troy Aikman?

TROY AIKMAN: What I'm telling you, that's not strictly for the players. We broadcast -- it's the coldest booth in the league. I'm not even sure what I'm going to wear for this game. I'm more worried about what I'm going to stay warm than I am for any of these players.

STEPHEN A. SMITH: I've got you. Let me transition before I let you get on out of here. I know you're not calling the AFC Championship Game, obviously, but Patrick Mahomes is expected, and we're anticipating he's going to play. You're a person who suffered some concussions in your career. We know what happened to him last week. How much of an impact do you expect that to have on his game, if at all, this Sunday against the Buffalo Bills?

TROY AIKMAN: Yeah, I don't think it will. I mean, it's a different time where they've got to go through some real protocols and meet certain requirements before they're allowed to go out and play; whereas, for us, I think if we could count to 10, we were back out there playing.

And I never missed a game after a concussion that I suffered. I was always playing the next week. And so I expect, too, like you said, I expect Patrick Mahomes to play. And I don't think it will be a factor whatsoever.

STEPHEN A. SMITH: Your thoughts about the combo that has been Josh Allen and Stefon Diggs this year; they've been incredibly impressive. Talk to me about that real quickly.

TROY AIKMAN: Been amazing. Josh Allen, the year that he's had, what he's done, he's terrific. He's been -- it's really an exciting team to watch. I think they're the one team that can really give Kansas City some problems.

We had that game earlier in the season and Kansas City ran the football really well in that regular-season game. But Stefon Diggs has given Josh Allen just another weapon along with Cole Beasley, and they're really threatened. He's terrific.

Stefon Diggs, I remember watching tape one week years ago of another opponent. And as I'm watching this defense, this No. 14 for the Vikings kept popping up. I finally go, who is this guy? It was his rookie year, Stefon Diggs. He's been lighting up the league ever since.

STEPHEN A. SMITH: One of the best to ever do it, not just on the field but clearly in the booth as well. And he's a

Cowboy, and I'm still saying that.

The one and only Troy Aikman. I appreciate you, buddy.
Thank you, man.

TROY AIKMAN: You got it, brother.

STEPHEN A. SMITH: All right.

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