

ATLANTA FALCONS

Atlanta Falcons vs. Cleveland Browns
Preseason Game 3
August 29, 2021

FALCONS

[Head Coach Arthur Smith](#)
[QB Josh Rosen](#)
[WR Russell Gage](#)
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BROWNS

[Head Coach Kevin Stefanski](#)
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FALCONS

Head Coach Arthur Smith

On the decision to play TE Kyle Pitts and his evaluation of Pitts:

"Yeah, with some of younger guys, even some of the younger guys that have played, wanted to give them a few snaps, get into a routine, and get ready for week one.

Kyle, we didn't want his first snap to be against Philly. We thought he has done a nice job all preseason. We tried to be smart with guys, evaluate those guys, and gave them a small package, let them go. Of course him and Hayden wanted to play the whole game, but you got to make those decisions.

Small sample size, but was good to get him a catch, and we'll see where we go now going into the regular season."

On his evaluation of QB Josh Rosen:

"I thought Josh handled it pretty well. Coming into a short week, he's been in it several systems, a very smart football player. We had a package for him in the game plan; he handled it well. I thought he showed his arm talent tonight.

Again, I thought he did a nice job overall."

On whether he's worried about the secondary moving forward:

"No, I thought the defense tonight, you know, we didn't bail them out enough situationally. Look, Cleveland made a couple plays, got a couple fourth down stops. Those are huge plays in the game, momentum changing plays. Only thing I was disappointed in was the turnover and giving the ball back and getting the penalty. We can't do that. That's a huge momentum play.

That will be addressed. That's not what we want to see, that's not who we want to be. We don't want to sit there. It's a great play by Kobe, we just got to be better operationally, and that's on me. I don't want to see that out there."

On whether QB Josh Rosen did enough to stick around:

"Sure, there are some things that we are going to want to watch the film, Terry and I and the whole football staff. We won't rush to judgment here. Give Josh credit. He came in here and handled it. We'll take everything into consideration. I'm not ready to make that statement right now. So, yeah."

On his plan for preseason playing time:

"Yeah, it was all intentional. It was really to get those guys ready in there. Again, if the drive had gone differently they probably would've been there a couple plays, and we have certain package plays. Again, you got to figure out what the quarterbacks can do."

So we felt it was the best plan for Feleipe to get him going. He's a different player than Josh. That's not a knock on either one of them. To me, that's the biggest part of my job is on the problem solve. The problem obviously we didn't score enough points.

But that was by design. If we had gotten into some drives, some different situations, those guys were going to be up for the first two series. Just didn't happen to work out that way the way things played out situationally. Got back, had a second down play.

So that was the plan with those guys."

On what he's looking for when making roster decisions:

"We played obviously the last game of the preseason, so we're not going to go out there and practice tomorrow. These guys need to recover. So we'll bring them in there on Tuesday. We can adjust. Had a little bit of a short roster, but that's fine."

There is also a bye week, too. We will practice three days and they're going to have off, which they deserve and that's part of the deal. So off Friday, Saturday, Sunday, so that is part of it."

On whether he's planning ahead for Tuesday's cuts:

"We'll talk about that as a staff. We have a plan. I'm just not going to share that here post-game."

On whether he has enough clarity on quarterbacks:

"Snap judgment, but I feel good right now, Jeff, but we need to look at the tape and evaluate. We're always looking at the roster. You never know who comes available."

Going to be a million calls around the league tomorrow between general managers. Not ready to make that statement. I thought for the most part Feleipe and Josh handled the plan.

Again, we got to score more points, stating the obvious. But the way they operated and the things we wanted to see out of them, they did a pretty decent job."

On whether injuries around the NFL in the preseason helped him make decisions about playing time this preseason:

"No, you know, look, there is a lot of ways to look at it. We had a plan. We had a strategy. We started out in the preseason, and certainly I would say the thing that changed our plan was maybe a little bit, to get a longer look at Josh Rosen. So obviously unfortunate what happened to AJ McCarron so then you got to be able to adapt."

But our plan for the majority of these guys was not to play them a lot in the preseason, and that was obvious. To get a full evaluation, we got a lot of young guys that we wanted to look at and need these game reps that we may not be relying on early, but chances and odds are we need them to play at some point for us this season, especially next year, and they need those game reps."

On whether he was ever going to play QB Matt Ryan in the preseason:

"No."

On how the veterans have shown they're ready to go:

"Yeah, several things. I mean, going back to Matt, Jeff, that's not going to be necessarily the plan. You know, at some point, depends on your quarterback situation. If we felt we were inexperienced there, sure, we would play the quarterbacks. That's what every coach and everybody is paid to do to make those decisions."

So that's why we didn't play Matt going into year 14. We thought he had a good camp, we felt really good about those joint practices, and we got three opportunities. Everybody is dealing with a new situation. You got a 17-game regular season we got to get ready to play for. It's a marathon.

We wanted to get as much valuable evaluation as we could to develop guys. The only way I know how to develop quarterbacks is to let them play. That's why we wanted to make sure they had a half. Feleipe got a game and a half, and then Josh tonight got a half."

On his evaluation of QB Josh Rosen's past week:

"Yeah, he did a good job. Like most of the players, very few people, especially in this business, are going to tell you, Hey, I want less. So that's my job, to make the decisions. The only thing, I'll put this on me, situationally you get down in the red zone, I wanted to see him throw it. Unfortunately we took the sack there."

I wanted to see him throw it, and so I conceded that. If you're a regular season game that is probably not some of the decisions I would've made, and that's the beauty of the preseason. Sometimes you feel like you're playing with house money.

Certainly everybody is entitled to your own opinion, but that's how we felt as a staff. To get an evaluation of the quarterback I was going to let him throw down there, so that's why I did that."

On whether he was pleased with only four penalties tonight:

"Yeah, that was a point of emphasis. You know, that's the thing I won't do here. We're not going to complain about the rules. This game is constantly evolving and has done a nice job with some of the things that needed to be cleaned up, and that's what the rules are. We want to coach the rules. We are not going to complain about them."

I wasn't very happy week one. Wanted to clean up some of the holds. We felt luckily, it's not perfect, but pleased at least we cut down the penalties."

On the defense keeping the Browns running game in check:

"Well, they did a nice job, you know, setting a wall out there. It's a really good running football team. Cleveland is built pretty similar to us stylistically, and Kevin and his staff and the whole operation, they did a nice job last year. To me, that's a good football team. We knew they were going to come in and at least try to run the football for the most part. I thought our guys stepped up."

On whether he's seen enough from QB Feleipe Franks to see where he fits in in the offense:

"Well, look, I don't have the ego to say it's my offense. This is our offense. It's the Atlanta Falcons offense. We got a really good staff and a lot of people, really good staff and players. It's our offense. My job as a coach is to make sure that it's not going to be one size fits all."

Feleipe is a completely different point in his career than Matt Ryan, than AJ McCarron, and Josh Rosen. Part of me developing him is to make sure we push him out of his comfort zone, see what he can do. But pleased with the progress he made. All different players."

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QB Josh Rosen

On how he would describe the last six days:

"Hectic. Yeah, I mean, fun. It's kind of, I don't know, just get an opportunity you got to seize the moment. Just kind of it was a little bit refreshing to get out on the field and half know the offense and just be able to let go and play football and have fun with it like you did back in Pop Warner."

Times I felt a little bit like a chicken with my head cut off running around, but I thought it was fun. Could have cleaned up a lot of stuff, but I thought overall it was a productive night."

On how he would assess his performance this week:

"I don't think it's much processing. It's just like show up early, stay late, study really hard, grip and rip it, and hope for the best. No other way to do it."

I mean, I've stumbled enough in my career at this point. Really it's just sort of full gas, like 100%. I mean, I'm in the facility this last week sun up, sun down. I don't have a whole lot more chances like that, so I'm just going to put my head down and keep swinging."

On whether he showed enough to win the backup quarterback position:

"That's not up to me."

On his assessment of his play tonight and his touchdown pass to WR Juwan Green:

"I thought just the feeling of throwing a touchdown pass and celebrating with the teammates and coming to the sideline and getting high fives, that was just a feeling I haven't had in a while and it felt well good."

I don't know, it's like that shot in golf that brings it back. It's like that's why we do it. It was fun. Glad I got to feel it again. Hopefully get to do it a bunch more in the future."

On his opportunity in Atlanta and whether he thinks it could be his last:

"Not really. More so like at the instance of a transaction, like things I place now, and I think once you get cut, you're just like, Dang, you sort of go through worst-case scenario, and you have to sort of use everything I've been taught through my career, meditate a lot, a lot of sort of sports psychology, everything you do through your whole career to stay mentally strong, snap out of it, and just remind yourself a couple hours later that I know I'm talented and I can play. I just need the opportunity and the right situation and sort of the right mindset.

I feel like I'm sort of more capable right now seizing an opportunity just because I feel like I've grown as an individual since my rookie year. I just feel like I've matured as an adult, a human. Yeah, funny enough, the way my career has gone I feel like as a human I'm in a better place than I have been in a while and it's a good feeling going out and having fun playing football. I missed it."

On having success in high school but not reaching that success in the NFL to this point:

"I think I'm just working on getting my confidence back. I'm the kind of football player I just like making plays. I got to work on just being more consistent and taking what defenses gives me. But just naturally within my game, that's how I separate myself, is I make plays with my arm, and in order to do that, I play best when I'm confident.

When I walk up to the line of scrimmage, there is no hesitation, just working on getting that back. I just haven't thrown the ball the much in the last two years, B-squad in Tampa and battling for a three spot in San Francisco.

Like I said, most fun part about the night was getting to play football, just knocking off some rust and having fun."

On the last time he's felt confident:

"I mean, there were a couple games in Arizona where I really feel like -- you don't really notice it until it sort of comes back, but honestly, out here. I wasn't really confident in play calls just because I was barely spitting them out, but it was coming off my hand probably better than it has in a while. Just feels really good."

On the last six days in terms of preparation:

"The package kind of incidentally grew in the middle of the game. We highlighted the plays we were in, but we ran through them pretty quick. In my headset he is like, 'You good with this play?' and I'm giving him a nod like, 'Yeah, I think so.' Sort of nudging a receiver like, 'Yo, what do you have on this?'

On working with QB Matt Ryan:

"It's been amazing. Sometimes vets you have to, guys in this the past, like ask them, sort of ask them questions and pick their brain and balance your personal sort of, not curiosity, but your want to ask questions and annoyance, and you kind of have to walk that fine line, but Matt is like overtly quizzing us on our calls ever. What are you doing here? What are you doing here? If I ask him anything, immediately, Matt has been amazing and I'm very grateful, and hopefully if I'm still here in a week I get to see him go

through the course of a season. Yeah, really excited, and he's been unbelievable in a short time I've been here."

On what he means by he's matured as an adult and a human:

"Yeah, I mean, people say you don't get a second chance to make a first impression. And that is true in the macro sense of the NFL. Said some dumb things coming out that I'm not all that proud of, but I've had a lot of chances to make first impressions with new teams and I think each one has been a little bit better at understanding that line and how to come in and support/demand things from guys and get everyone going and how to conduct yourself. Just like what coaches do to go ask certain questions. There is a lot behind the scenes. I don't know. Just feel like I'm growing up and excited for the future."

On where he felt his maturing occurred:

"I mean, I owe a lot of my personal and professional development, to Fitz, Ryan Fitzpatrick, because I think -- not thought I knew it all, but like I didn't really understand what it really took to be a pro and to be a professional quarterback in this league.

I started all through high school and college and into the NFL up to that point, other than like three games in Arizona, but got benched in Miami and then I just like this isn't working out. Like I'm tall, smart, I can throw the ball. What's going on here? I'm going to follow Fitz around all day, every day, every minute, and see what he thinks, does, and all that.

Sort of from Fitz I learned how much time and effort and discipline and sort of multi-faceted like thing being a quarterback is. So got released from Miami, went to Tampa, because I was like, I want to learn from Tom. I want to see the best. Miami is still paying me so I can be on the practice squad and not have to worry about it. I am going to take a year and study what it means to be a quarterback.

And getting to be in the same room with arguably the greatest of all-time is amazing. So after that year it was like, let's go to San Fran and see if what I've been studying this last year and a half has helped me out a little bit. Didn't work out, but came here, and I feel like this is a really good opportunity to just play football again. That's what I keep saying. I am just really sort of grateful to be able to just go out and throw a touchdown and celebrate with teammates.

On the reason for incompletions on the first few drives:

"Just miscommunications. There were probably a lot more than you guys noticed, too."

On directing traffic on his first third down:

"Yeah just trying to get my guy in motion and I think he was like lining up or something, trying to get his feet in the ground. Just had to yell his name and tell him cut across."

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WR Russell Gage

On Hurricane Ida hitting Louisiana:

"I've been following the whole thing and you know, it's crazy. It brings back old memories, but I've been following it a lot."

On his family evacuating for Hurricane Ida:

"Yeah, so my family came down. That was a decision we made you know, to get them away from everything. They came down to be with me."

On watching the news to keep up with Hurricane Ida:

"Yeah, so especially leading up, I was in the hotel and my TV was on CNN the whole time and I was just kind of listening to them, checking out everything. Like I said, it brought back old memories to them talking about the winds, the possible flood areas, and everything so I've definitely been following it and also my fiancé has some family down there and she gets information from them. She then feeds the information to me. So, yeah I've been following it."

On his memories of Hurricane Katrina:

"It was just so much chaos, disaster, you know, just not good. Every time I think about it, I think about my situation. I have family, I have people, and as far as Katrina is concerned, they were from New Orleans, lived in New Orleans and that whole experience was life-changing, life-altering. Just knowing the possibilities of what could happen it just creeps up on me and puts me in a different space. I think everyone is doing a good job at preparing and taking the proper measures to make sure they're ok."

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TE Kyle Pitts**On his first NFL catch and the atmosphere of his first game:**

"It definitely was fun. I feel like my heart was moving faster than my legs, but just fun being out there feeling that atmosphere and being in the game and around some guys that help me appreciate it."

On going up against players with a different jersey, competing outside of practice and training camp:

"It was great. I just love competing, so just any time that I get the chance to go against anyone else is always a good time."

On Head Coach Arthur Smith not wanting his first game reps to be against Philadelphia in Week 1:

"I've always been preparing each game to play and to be ready and every week, just trying to make myself better."

On reaction from crowd, standing ovation from his first NFL rep being a 27-yard reception:

"I feel like when I go in, I can't hear anything so maybe I didn't hear the loudness, but once I looked back at it, it was pretty fun."

On if he feels like he's had enough time between camp and first preseason appearance to be ready for the regular season:

"I think there's always room for improvement and each week there is something better that you can get on. So just now, after I've seen what I did this game, I want to try and make it better for game one."

On his thoughts about being named Player of the Game after having just one catch:

"I thought they would have given it to Juwan (Green) but I was appreciative of it."

On if his one possession prepared him for the regular season:

"I think it did — just the speed and seeing how fast it really is just to try and prepare myself for the first game."

On his opportunity to play in the last preseason game after not appearing in the first two:

"I feel like I'm just excited to prepare for each game and to act like I'm going to be in the game. So just to be able to actually go out there and play was pretty fun."

On what he's learned from QB Matt Ryan in the time they've been together:

"Preparation and sleep — those are two things he harps on which kind of helps your mind sleep first and you being better than the day before."

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BROWNS

Head Coach Kevin Stefanski

OPENING STATEMENT:

"Ok, good to get a win down here. I thought the guys really played hard. From the first quarter through the last quarter, I thought the guys really played hard. Approaching with these cuts is the really tough part of this business. I just told the team that. I wish we could keep every single one of them, that's not the reality of the situation. So, I just told them I appreciate how they work, and that's a group that they've worked in every turn everything they've done everything I asked them to do. So I was certainly appreciative of that and then we'll see how it all shakes out but it's the business of football, but I know, doesn't mean you have to like it, but really pleased with how the guys battled tonight."

On his assessment of the team right now:

"I thought the first group did a nice job. Wasn't clean on the whole time, but I thought they were mostly assignment sound. I thought Baker [Mayfield] was sharp, he was really sharp through warm-ups, he was very excited to play."

On whether the first two drives were scripted:

"Yes."

On whether QB Baker Mayfield forced his way to play tonight:

"No, but I just think Baker's such a competitor. So, he loves to go out there and compete against the team and so it was good to get them out there. I thought he did a nice job."

On the progress of the team so far:

"I think we're where we need to be for right now, but we're not where we need to be in a couple of weeks. We still have a lot of work to do, but I think just all in all I thought the operation was good. We got down there in the red zone and don't score – and listen – we should score, but you're also not showing anything and you're trying to keep it very simple and vanilla for reasons. You want to just make sure you get to the season with some of your best stuff. Doesn't mean it's going to work in the season, but just trying to make sure that we're smart about what we're showing on tape."

On WR KhaDarel Hodge's performance in training camp and the preseason:

"I will tell you all the guys that the evaluation is a total evaluation, it's practice, it's the joint practices, it's the games. Obviously when you're out there in the games you want to perform well. So KhaDarel has had a nice camp. There was a nice throw and catch early in that ballgame for a touchdown, but it's a total evaluation, and I thought he's done a nice job."

On the importance of special teams when evaluating roster decisions:

"I will just tell you with everybody it matters. It's certainly something that we keep in mind, for all these moves, like I said before, I'd love to keep everybody. I don't think they're going to relax the rules just for me, but it's just the nature of the beast."

On his decision to attempt a field goal at the end of the first half:

"I think it's a pretty cut dry make or miss in this league, but that's not easy. I mean that's a challenging kick and wanted to give him a swing at it."

On whether he is comfortable with K Chase McLaughlin:

"I will tell you all these guys are working very hard. He's competing for a spot, and I know he had that miss, but he's done a nice job in camp. Again we value those practice reps the joint practice reps the game reps, it's all of it."

On DT Malik McDowell's stock on defense:

"I don't know about stock, but I just would tell you that he's done a nice job really since the day he showed up on campus. He's been diligent about his work. He's taken to the coaching that Coach Kiffin and Coach Garrett are giving to him in from a technique standpoint. He's making plays in these games. So, again, all part of that evaluation but I'm pleased with what he's doing."

On his assessment of CB A.J. Green:

"Second-year player without a preseason last year, these game reps are so valuable. So he did a nice job in that regard. He's made plays in practice, made a few plays tonight. I know they got one on him, but he's done a nice job. He's been diligent about it. Wasn't pleased with his play there on punt, but he just lost track of the returner there. He's working hard."

On what has been accomplished in training camp and preseason:

"We're so focused on the progress process really is a better term, in our teaching progressions, how we install how we've decided to ramp this thing up. So we're pleased with where we are after three preseason games, but we have three days of practice next week. The guys are going to go on a three-day break before we get ready for Kansas City week. So we have a lot of work to do, and the guys know

that. You may be exiting training camp, but the focus is going to continue to be on we have to get better. There are areas that we have to get better."

On whether he feels the team is on track to play well against the Chiefs in Week 1:

"Obviously we'll talk about them as we get closer to the season but it's certainly a challenge. We understand that, but we're going to keep the focus on ourselves as we get back into Cleveland tonight or this morning whenever it is and then, again, those three days of practice week."

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QB Baker Mayfield

On seeing preseason action and his evaluation of the first two drives:

"Yeah, getting game experience is always great. I think for the most part it was smooth. We had one false start by Jedrick [Wills], but if we clean that up, then just one misalignment – just little things here and there. It's the preseason. That's to be expected somewhat, so we'll clean that up and start heading onto the Chiefs."

On whether preseason action is helpful for him and whether he was excited to play tonight:

"Yeah, I mean for an 8 pm game especially, the mental preparation and waiting around the hotel and getting ready to go, you have to get used to that. So, that was good for me to get that under my belt and to get to feel that routine again. Yeah, I was excited. Anytime I get to play football, I'm excited."

On his touchdown pass to WR KhaDarel Hodge:

"Yeah we were faking the run to the right and rolling out left. Knowing that the safeties were down, had an open shot that if I didn't have the flat route right now, but had a one-on-one with him on the corner route. They brought some pressure, and he made a great play. Great route and a great catch to finish it."

On WR KhaDarel Hodge's performance this training camp and preseason:

"He's a constant guy no matter what's going on. He provides so much to our special teams part of this unit as well. He's making plays consistently, obviously. He doesn't get a lot of recognition but he does a lot of the dirty work. We're very appreciative of that in the building, and I hope he knows that. When he gets that time to shine, he's going to play that guitar."

On the biggest benefit of preseason reps:

"I think getting used to coming off of the sideline, talking about the looks, just preparation and playing a different opponent scheme-wise and seeing how they're going to attack us and try to disguise certain looks. Just that recognition of game speed, picking your guys up off of piles, getting a couple of hits – I didn't get hit – but those little extra things effort wise that might tire you out, getting used to that in the game reps. It's good stuff."

On whether he feels the team is ready for the regular season:

"I know our guys are ready. They've been itching to go. We can feel that, how close it is. Just all that preparation you put in throughout the offseason and ever since you lost to the Chiefs in January, we've been working to this point right now and I think our guys are ready to go. A few more things to clean up."

The worst part of this business is the cuts that we have to make, unfortunately. It sucks, but we have a good group, so it's hard."

On his pass to RB D'Ernest Johnson:

"D'Ernest is a guy that just makes plays happen when he gets the ball in his hands. Another guy that does a lot on special teams, does the dirty work. He runs angry. He's not a big guy but he runs very physical. We're happy to have him on our team. He made a good play on the screen. They brought some pressure, and he did exactly what he was supposed to do. Got the ball into his hands and he did the rest."

On his comfort level with his offensive line:

"I'm really fortunate to have those guys, there's no doubt about that. I talked about that quite a bit last year. Just the protection they provide and obviously in the run game as well. We're lucky as a skill group to be able to run behind those guys and to be able to have time to throw."

On working with C Nick Harris:

"We had a lot of guys that had to step up last year at different points. JC [Tretter] is a guy that's a warrior, too. He's played through some injuries and we're thankful for that, but it's great to have guys that can go in and get those game reps. Nick was in there with our starters, so to have him surrounded by that and for them to get a feel cadence-wise and everything, it's all good stuff."

On whether he spoke to Drew Brees tonight:

"I was able to speak with him during the production meeting and congratulate him on his retirement. He said he's more busy now than he was when he was playing. He's a living legend and a first-ballot Hall of Famer. Did it the right way always. He's a guy that I've always looked up to considering that we're from the same town and he's just a great guy."

On RB Demetric Felton:

"As a rookie, a lot of things happen pretty fast and you can get a little bit confused at times. We've thrown two positions at him. He's played a little bit of receiver and a little bit of running back and he's handled it extremely well. He's a smart guy, and another guy that once he gets the ball in his hands, he can make plays. We got a steal on him getting him late, and he's just a good athlete."

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