

# Pittsburgh Steelers

## Media Conference

Sunday, September 27, 2020  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach Mike Tomlin

Postgame Press Conference



Texans 21, Steelers 28

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: You know, first I got to start off by tipping my cap to Coach O'Brien and the Houston Texans. They had a really good plan. It took us a while to get adjusted to it. They made plays early on in all three phases and we were trying to find our rhythm.

I thought the guys did a nice job, players and coaches, communicating, making necessary adjustments at the half, and finding our rhythm in the second half, getting the necessary stops and possessing the ball.

So it was a lot to be proud of in terms of the efforts. It was good to get McFarland involved. I thought our utilization of all the backs was a good element of play for us.

The defense didn't blink. We gave up some possessions early. Sometimes that can put a bad taste in your mouth but they didn't allow it to spoil the day. They just played one snap at a time, and we were able to get some significant stops in the second half. I thought the turnover by Mike Hilton was enormous.

From an injury standpoint, Derek Watt has a hamstring. Diontae Johnson has a concussion. The rest are just bumps and bruises associated with play. I'll update you guys on Tuesday.

Questions.

**Q. What did you guys specifically do to stop Watson in the second half?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: We just mixed some things up with our coverages and we rushed a little bit differently. He was fine in escape lanes, not necessarily in an effort to run but in an effort to buy time and break some of our zone coverages down and find open spaces. So we made minor technical adjustments to both the rush and the coverage, and I think that was the difference.

**Q. Like you said, a lot more zone coverage today. Is that basically because of Watson and his ability to potentially pull down the ball and run with some defensive backs back to the ball?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: You play man to man versus this guy on possession downs. He could run for 100 yards himself. So we just thought with guys having vision to break, it could help the rush if he was able to escape, and it benefited us some today. But that's just the method that we chose today. He's got special talents, he presents unique challenges, so we did what we had to do to win the game.

**Q. You mentioned the other day you liked the trajectory of the run game because you were able to close out games with it in the first two. You did it again today. How important has that been for you and your guys?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: It's been critical because all these games are close. Everything in the national football league is a one score game. So your ability in the waning moments to possess the ball and not put your defense back in harm's way, to win the critical possession downs, be it a run or run like action.

I can't say enough what Ben was able to do in some of those short yardage situations. We did supplement the run with some quick RPO passing game that allowed us to sustain drives and possess the ball. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that as well.

**Q. You mentioned Anthony McFarland in your opening statement. What told you this week that he was ready to be more involved in the game plan? He was inactive the first week and didn't play last week. Why was he ready to step up in this moment?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: He was ready last week. That's why we had the hat on him. Sometimes game circumstances doesn't allow certain roles to develop or, you know, things of that nature. We like the overall trajectory of his game. He's been working hard and practicing hard and having professional detail in his work.

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So we had trust in his abilities. So it was good to get him in the mix. He brings a different skill set than maybe some of others, and I think they compliment each other well.

**Q. You mentioned your defense after a tough first half. What allows the group to do that? What does it say about your coaching and your players?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: We made some adjustments and more than anything I like the group's ability to adjust and to communicate in the midst of it. There wasn't a lot of blink in the group. They absorbed the necessary adjustments and sometimes that's necessary. People are going to have good plans. They work too.

And so we had to do some adjusting and really I just -- kudos to the coaches and those guys for communicating and not blinking in the midst of some of those things that transpire when those things happen.

**Q. You mentioned earlier mixing up the backs a little bit and getting everybody some touches in the first half but in the second half it was mostly James in there. Could you feel him sort of exerting his will out there?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: James is our featured runner. I've mentioned that repeatedly. It doesn't mean we won't play others, but it does mean as we distribute carries, and particularly as we find our rhythm in the game, usually that I would include him, unless somebody else has an unusual hot hand. And we don't care who gets the credit or who make makes the plays, that's just the approach that we take.

**Q. I was wondering if we can get a comment from you about the contributions of your tight ends and was that something that you saw potentially being a focal point for the offense?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: I'll probably get another seven days before you guys ask me about Ebron, I would imagine.

No, we're going utilize all of our eligibles. It's important that we have a balanced group, that we can run it, we can throw it. That we have a variety of people to throw to it. We like the versatility of the group, the specialization of the group, and it allows us to move the ball fluidly.

**Q. You mentioned the third and fourth and shorts and throws. Is that just a matter of putting the ball in your best player's hand and is it difficult to call passes in what has traditionally been a running situation?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: Well, if they can go zero, I mean, they were going open field, goal line, defense and things of that nature. You can't run the ball into that. So, you know, we had some RPO options. We trust Ben, we trust our run game. We're not going to allow people to cheat to that extent where they got a goal line defense in open grass. We'll do what we got to do to win the down.

**Q. What is it about Hilton that makes him such a noticeable contributor each week on defense?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: He's just a tough little football player. He's a football player first and nickle second. He's good in the run game. He's solid in the passing game as well, and that provides a platform for him to be noticed in a variety of spaces.

**Q. Did you think that something changed? We were talking to T.J. and he thought first half to second half they weren't getting to the quarter back as much. What did you see in your pass rush?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: In our pass rush? I'm sorry. I don't understand your question.

**Q. Yeah. Did you think your pass rush was able to get home in the second half better than it did in the first half?**

COACH MIKE TOMLIN: Like I mentioned earlier, we made some minor adjustments, not significant ones. I just thought it was the difference, and oftentimes that is the case. It's not dramatic things, it's not things we can talk openly about in this setting and maybe you guys appreciate.

But it's necessary adjustments for us. We did what was necessary and we were able to close the door more consistently in the second half.

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