

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Mike Tomlin

Postgame Press Conference



MIKE TOMLIN: Man, we're really proud of these guys today, just because it was a challenging week. It wasn't a very fluid week for us in terms of dealing with COVID in the manner in which we had to. We had a number of significant guys that weren't allowed to come to work. We were working remotely from a meeting standpoint, didn't have a lot of exposure to our guys. So there was a lot of anxiety about just feeling good about the prep. It's good to kind of face that and persevere and come and have that type of performance.

So it was something to build from there. We understand the environment that we're in. There could be some of that in the future, and we've just got to be vigilant about, number one, working our tails off to keep ourselves and everyone else safe, but number two, not letting some of the challenges of the pandemic be a factor in terms of the quality of our play. It's something globally that everybody has to deal with, and I like the way the group embraced the challenges of it this week.

So on the injury front, Trey Edmunds wasn't able to finish the game with a hamstring. We had some normal bumps and bruises associated with play. It was good to get Tyson Alualu back, Derek Watt back. We're going to need contributions from those guys down the stretch. We got Avery Williamson some defensive snaps today. So a lot of positivity, a lot of things to build upon as we move forward and get ready for our next test, which is on the road in J-ville.

Q. Relative to your opening point, Ben doesn't practice all week and comes out and is attacking downfield and big game with yards and touchdowns. Are you surprised at all he can play like that with no practice basically?

MIKE TOMLIN: No, and like I said earlier in the week, there was less anxiety in terms of dealing with him in these circumstances maybe than some of the circumstances he and I have been in the past where his health was a factor in terms of availability. His health was not a factor, so we

had very little reservations about his ability to perform once we got him to the stadium.

Q. Was this the most complete performance you've seen from your defense today, especially given the way things went down in Dallas last week? Just what did you like about what you were able to do there limiting the Bengals?

MIKE TOMLIN: I like what we did on third down. I wouldn't call the rest the most complete, whatever you referred to it as. Third down was complete. We were really good on possession downs, and that defined the day for the group.

Q. How important was it for the offense? We've been talking about deep balls for a while and asking you about it for Ben to connect on the long one for Diontae? Do you feel that opened up the passing game at all?

MIKE TOMLIN: There's no question. They were packing the line of scrimmage pretty good. So some of the run sledging was difficult. So we weren't surprised that there were opportunities in the passing game, particularly down the field.

Q. Did you expect Ben to throw as many times as he did today, and is the run game getting to be a little bit of a concern?

MIKE TOMLIN: We're a balanced group. We can to give it to you however you want it. If you want to pack a bunch on the line of scrimmage, we're going to throw it. You play two high safeties, we're capable of running it. That's what I mean when I say we strive to be a balanced group. We want to be able to move it however, however we choose, or maybe over commitments and so forth from defenses that dictate it, we're okay with that too.

Q. Mike, do you think starting with the message in late July of things might be different this year in the way of preparation set a phone for potentially what happened this week?

MIKE TOMLIN: I was hopeful. Those were my intentions. None of us have a crystal ball, but I knew this season was

going to lack fluidity at some times, and there were going to be challenges. That's just proven business to work to get out in front of it or at least shape the group's mentality in terms of dealing with it.

Q. Mike, Brooks wasn't activated until very late in the preparation process. I assume the plan was to use him some in sub all along. Why was that, and what convinced you that Marcus Allen was the guy in the dime?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, we're just being challenged by player availability. We've got some young guys that are working hard every day and earning an opportunity to play and play defense. Guys like Marcus Allen and Antoine Brooks, man, are working their tails off every day and getting better. Losing guys -- Devin Bush, Ulysees Gilbert, Mike Hilton -- best providing opportunities like some of the guys that you mentioned.

We don't fear giving them an opportunity to play provided that they earn it. Those guys have earned it with work during the course of the week. We'll take a look at the tape and move forward, and hopefully it strengthens us as a collective moving forward. I know that getting Mike Hilton back and having Antoine Brooks with some experience that he gained tonight is not a bad thing for us.

Q. Mike, what leads to or keys that success on third down?

MIKE TOMLIN: We were just trying to mix things up. We didn't want to give him any clean looks. We wanted to play some man to man. We played some man to man that was important to minimize Tyler Boyd. I can't say enough the level of respect that we have for him and what he does in the game and particularly on the inside on possession downs. So a lot of our plan was to work to at least minimize his impact at that moment.

Q. Three weeks in a row, you've lauded your team's resiliency and being able to finish. Today when they were a little bit more dominant, what was the feeling for you?

MIKE TOMLIN: My emotions are less important than the work. I don't get caught up in my emotions, to be quite honest with you. I'm focused on being what they need me to be, and I just think that's the job that all of us, as coaches, have.

Q. Hey, Coach, I know you gave up, but you had a big return --

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm sorry. You chopped up a little bit. I

missed some of the question.

Q. I'm sorry. You gave a fake punt, but you had the big return by Ray-Ray McCloud, and your punter bailed you out a couple times with some big kicks.

MIKE TOMLIN: Yeah, you know, we knew the circumstances they were in from a special teams unit standpoint, and they were going to be aggressive, just like Dallas was aggressive a week ago. I think that just comes with wearing the crown, if you will. We're going to get people's best shot. We're going to get plays such as that, and we've got to do a better job than we've done in the last couple weeks in terms of dealing with it.

In terms of Ray-Ray, he's been really consistent in terms of being a potential game breaker for us. We're excited about his growth and development. We'll just keep working and keep getting him to stadiums.

Q. Mike, this team is so dominant against rookie quarterbacks. You guys are 25-4 since 2004. What does it mean that this defense is consistently able to make statements against rookies, especially ones that are in your division?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't want to make too much out of it. I'd imagine that everybody's record is generally pretty good versus rookie quarterbacks. I'd imagine rookie quarterbacks lose more than they win. Experience is a big element of that job. We don't read too much into that. Our job was to beat the Bengals today.

Q. Mike, I'm curious, will you guys remain in that intensive protocol this week? What's your level of comfort there having been through it now a couple weeks in a row?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'd imagine we're going to remain where we are. I don't know how comfortable I am. I don't know that any of us are comfortable, but we'd better be comfortable with what it is we need to do, and that's work our tails off to remain COVID-free and safeguard ourselves and each other, and I think that's what we're committed to.

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