

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

Monday, December 7, 2020
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA



Ron Rivera

Postgame Press Conference

Washington Football Team - 23, Pittsburgh Steelers - 17

Q. What did you tell the team after this one?

RON RIVERA: I told them it was well earned. We talked about the biggest thing, more so than anything else, is your reputation, your record. When you get on the field, those things don't matter. What matters is who plays the best and I thought our guys played pretty doggone good today.

Q. How does this win rank with some of the other games you've coached, given the situation, down 14-0?

RON RIVERA: It's up there. Again, in spite of some of the decisions I made today, they played their asses off. This really does rank up there just because of the fact that, who we beat. We beat them in Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh Steelers. That's one of the storied franchises as well in this league. So to come in and win, that was big for our guys. I'm real proud of them.

Q. All season long your team has been resilient. They have never quit, especially in the second half. Where does that come from?

RON RIVERA: Well, that's kind of something that we talked about. We talked about fighting. There's no reason to stop playing. It doesn't matter what the score is. I just think that's who they are. These are a bunch of young guys that are learning how to play, with some veterans sprinkled in there at the right positions and I think that we're growing and we're learning.

We got a ways to go, but I'm very proud of the way they played today.

Q. What do you make of the way Alex Smith has not only played over the last few weeks, but obviously everything he's overcome and to deal with another injury out there early in the game. What did you make of his play?

RON RIVERA: Very proud of him. Again, first of all, this is a heck of a defense we played against today and he took, he was patient and he took what they were giving us and that was probably the biggest thing.

I really thought Scotty did a nice job with the play calling in terms of just putting Alex in position to take what they were giving us and we did. We were very patient. Couple times we took a couple shots, but the biggest thing is we were patient and that's the most important thing.

Q. Just curious, what was the mood like in the locker room? If you could describe what it was like after that win in the locker room.

RON RIVERA: Euphoria. They really are. These guys deserve it. We have been down for such a long time and we're trying to rebuild ourselves and build up. This is something that we can build off of and just really proud of the way they played.

Q. This season you've had a tough time getting the offense going if you didn't have either Terry or Antonio. Against a really good defense today you guys did that. What do you attribute that to?

RON RIVERA: Just spreading the ball around. If you look at it again, all the guys that were targeted, and that's the important thing is because when you start spreading the ball and stop, and not trying to force it, I think it opens more things up. It opened up a little of the running game at times for us at the right time. We spread it around. Cam started to make some big plays. We started throwing it underneath, whether we were throwing it to Logan or we were throwing it to one of the backs coming out of the back field. When you do that, you give yourself a chance to win because again they can't just focus in on one or two guys.

Q. You guys maybe struggled a little bit defensively at times in the first half but then really cranked it up. What changed? What allowed you guys to pretty much put the clamps on them in the second half?

RON RIVERA: Well, we didn't give up big plays. If you go back and look at their two scoring drives, they had two

really big plays that set it up. And that's something that we can't give up.

And again, I'll tell you what, though, they bowed their neck and they saved their coach's ass. I thought we had a chance to run a play and sneak one in and they had a guy make a heck of a play on that fourth down. But the defense bowed their neck and saved me. That's for darn sure.

Q. What did you make of that fourth down play where you stopped them with Casey's tackle?

RON RIVERA: I just, again, I get it. I mean, the fourth down situations right now, a lot of us are going for it because we know just how important it is to convert, especially when you get into certain positions or certain parts of the field.

Q. What can you say about your defensive line who may not have gotten home much, but they had their hands up all night, just how proud are you of that unit?

RON RIVERA: Very proud of them. It was one of the things that they were talking about with the coaches, was getting our hands up, getting our hands up, getting our hands up, and he's, I tell you what, Ben's, I mean, him firing the ball the way he did, that's going to be tough to sack him.

Q. When you lose a playmaker early, like Gibson, at the very beginning of the game, I mean, that can be deflating and yet it didn't seem like that really --

RON RIVERA: I think because we have more than one playmaker. And so it sure, it's deflating, but when you got J.D. McKissic and Peyton Barber, who really are good one-two tandem as well, there's nothing wrong with that.

You got the receivers you got that are making plays, there's nothing wrong with that. And then the tight end steps up and make some big plays. So there was a lot of pluses, a lot of positives in today's game.

Q. Speaking of the big plays from the tight end, Logan Thomas obviously had the one-handed catch, he had the almost touchdown, and then he has the touchdown. Can you sort of speak to the effort that he had in game and as well as Cam's?

RON RIVERA: Logan just continues to grow. I know Pete Hoener really felt that this was a guy that was on the verge of taking the next step and so when we got him in free agency, it was one of those things that Coach Pete just felt, Hey, here's a guy that we can develop and help him get

better, and he sure has and he's fitting in our offense, just doing a heck of a job.

Q. Are you surprised by how effective he is, even just despite what you said?

RON RIVERA: Well, I think what's interesting is when you go back and you watch his tape, it was, like, gosh, he really doesn't get a lot of opportunities about, but when he's had opportunities, he's done well.

So, yeah, it's good to see. To a degree, I'm surprised but, also I'm not because he has the skill set. He's got the size, the speed, the strength. He's got great hands, and he knows the game. He understands the game and that's very important.

Q. Congratulating your guys at the end, is that something you normally would do after a big win or kind of what was going through your mind there?

RON RIVERA: No, I wanted to. Usually I come in and get my, collect my thoughts, and I wanted to greet everybody as they were coming in. They earned it. They really did. I'm just very proud of what they did today.

Q. A lot of guys made, obviously, key individual plays, but Dustin Hopkins is a guy who is kind of struggled at times this year. What does this say, I think it was 3-3 today about his performance overall?

RON RIVERA: Last week he was perfect too, so knock on wood it continues. And again, sometimes you get into a little bit of a slump. He worked his way out of it and he's been solid. He really has. And just really happy with what he did, again, working himself through his situation and it was a tough field to kick off of today too.

Q. What did the doctor tell you about Gibson?

RON RIVERA: What's my thought on Gibson? We'll see what happens. I'm not quite sure. I haven't talked to the trainers about anybody right now, but I'm about to go in and find out what the situation is.

Q. What did you see on the interception with Sweat getting his hands up and making the play there?

RON RIVERA: Well, just really that was it. We were having a tough time getting to the quarterback, so we tried to get as big a surge as we can, so we get our hands up and into the throwing lane and really that was one of the things that they started talking about doing was just get the surge, get your hands up.

Q. Scoreboard watching yesterday, and you saw the Giants beat Seattle and obviously, you probably understood this was a game you probably had to have to keep pace. I guess the big picture here, NFC East, what's a win like this do going forward with the Giants right there as well?

RON RIVERA: Well, it's awesome. It's interesting because one of the things that we talked about was taking care of our business and we'll worry about what we need to do as opposed to worrying about everybody else. And that's the thing, we got to continue to focus on us and just work on getting better. So I was real pleased with the way they played.

Q. I asked you earlier this week about what it would take to come into Heinz Field and win here, especially since Washington has never done so and also they've never beaten Mike Tomlinson since he took over as coach. Can you just remark on the historical nature of the win as well here too?

RON RIVERA: Well, it's big. And I think that something the guys should be proud of. They earned that because this, again, this is a good football team and we're learning, growing, and getting better and better every day, every time we get on the football field. So just happy with it.

Historically, yeah, it kind of gets the, it gets the gorilla off our back. It just shows us that we have the ability to play against good teams, if we play our game, if we focus in on what we're capable of doing.

Q. In 2018, you had that speech at halftime against the Steelers with all access. You said that you needed, you told your team that you needed to challenge them, and that teams like the Steelers try to punch you in the mouth. Did you feel that happening here?

RON RIVERA: I did. There were a couple things that went on on the field with our guys that they didn't take it. This is a team that comes in and they're physical, their physical play, and they play to intimidate you.

And I told our guys, Hey, we got to bow our necks. We got to stand up to them. We just don't take it. And let's match them. That's how you play these good teams. You try to play their game and if you can do it successfully, you have a chance to win and that's what our guys did. They gave themselves a chance.

Q. I know you have a lot of season still to play, but what's happened over the last three weeks culminating in today? As you say, the team has been growing. How gratifying is that for you personally with COVID,

with your health struggles, just everything that's gone on to have a win like this today, what you've been building towards? Can you put that into words?

RON RIVERA: It shows that we have the potential. It shows that we have the kind of players you need to give yourself a chance to win. And I think we have got a good mix going right now. We got to continue to build off of it.

Q. Can you take us through the end of the first half. It looked like Alex Smith had some blood on his foot. Did you get a report on that? And then how important that sequence was to get three points before you went into the locker room?

RON RIVERA: It's interesting, there's a little bit of a stat and this is why people defer. And the stat basically says if you can score going into halftime and score coming out, you increase your opportunities to win by about 70 percent, and we did that. We kicked the field goal and then we turned around and scored a touchdown. So there was 10 points, two consecutive possessions, and that's huge.

That was one of the things -- use timeouts to conserve time just before the half, and we were able to put ourselves in position to kick the field goal and that was big because it gave us some momentum going in. The offense felt pretty good about themselves. Scotty talked to them and said, Hey, this is what we're going to do to get after them, and that was good to see.

Q. You said that we were going to learn something about this team based on how they performed against the Steelers. This is the first win you guys have against a winning team. What you do think people have learned about your football team from this victory?

RON RIVERA: I think they learned that our guys can be resilient, first of all, which we have seen. Secondly, I think it showed that we can play with teams like Pittsburgh. We have got to be able to make sure we understand that we're capable of it.

And I think it tells the other teams that, Hey, we're pretty good. We got some guys that can play and we have got to go out and just do our thing.

Q. I know the question came up about the blood on Alex Smith. Did you get a chance to see that and if you did, what was your reaction to that?

RON RIVERA: No, I didn't. I haven't talked to the trainer. I'm going to assume he might have gotten stepped on or scratched or something like that and he's probably -- I



know he came in at halftime and got it cleaned up, but I didn't talk to anybody about it yet.

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