

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Art Rooney, II

Press Conference



looking at the playoff game, when you turn the ball over four times in the first half, you're not going to beat very many people. Take nothing away from the Cleveland Browns. They have a good team. But we just didn't give ourselves a chance. Don't need to overanalyze that. We just didn't give ourselves a chance.

With that, I'm happy to take some questions.

Q. Were you able to talk to Ben at all since the off-season, and has there been any indication if you guys want him back, if he wants to come back? Could you fill us in on where you're at with him right now?

ART ROONEY II: Yeah. Ben has been in. I haven't sat down with him myself yet, but he sat down with Coach Tomlin and Kevin, and Ben wants to come back. We've left that door open.

We've been, I think, up front with Ben in letting him know that we couldn't have him back under the current contract, and so I think he understands we have some work to do there. We'll have more conversations and we'll have more conversations internally, we'll have more conversations with Ben, and obviously we'll have to know what the cap number is at some point to really finalize some of those decisions.

Q. How do you assess the last really 10 years? Your playoff wins are kind of few and far between since that last Super Bowl. Does that tell you anything about the way you're doing things or who you're doing it with?

ART ROONEY II: You know, sometimes you go through stretches and you don't like them. We went through a stretch from 1980 to 2005, a quarter of a century, I guess, between Super Bowl wins at one point.

It doesn't change our mindset that we're going to try to put a team on the field every year that can compete for a championship. As I said, I went into this season thinking that we had that kind of team, and really if I had my druthers, I'd say if I could have the same roster back going into next year, I'd do it.

Obviously that's not going to be the case, but just in terms

ART ROONEY II: Good afternoon. Thanks for joining us this afternoon. Sorry we can't be together in person, but hopefully sometime soon.

I want to start by saying obviously it's been an unusual year. It was an unusual season. I want to say thanks to our fans for their patience and support throughout that season, particularly our season ticket holders, who I know many of you would have liked to have attended a game, and sorry we couldn't accommodate that.

I also want to acknowledge and thank the many people, particularly on our staff, who helped us get through the season. Again, a season like no other, but really a number of people that really were responsible for picking up unusual duties, setting up training camp at Heinz Field, and really everyday testing, all kinds of things went into the season that people on our staff went above and beyond. So thanks to all of them.

Regarding our season, you know, I came into the season thinking we had a strong roster and a team that could compete for a championship. We started off 11-0 and won our division, so a lot of good things. But we stumbled at the end, so disappointing in that we thought we had the kind of team that could have and should have gone farther.

Some of the factors, I think, that went into some of the negative side of the season was inconsistency on offense and really a lack of a running game that contributed to that inconsistency. It was tough to overcome that at times.

Obviously the many schedule changes that we had, it's hard to say what impact that had on us, but I think it did have an impact at one point when we went into that stretch of losing three in a row. And during that stretch, no coincidence that we lost Bud Dupree in that time frame, and losing Bud at that point in the season was a big loss.

It's hard to say what all factors were most important, but



of how we're doing things and whether we're doing something right or wrong, I think we had ourselves set up to go into the season and had an 11-0 record at one point, won our division. So I'm not going to overanalyze what we did over the last 10 years based on that.

Q. Can you go back over the last three or four seasons, those late-season collapses, and identify maybe why that is, and is it something that you feel you can correct?

ART ROONEY II: You know, I think it's hard to go back. Let's go back last year; we played the last part of the season with our third rd and fourth string quarterback at times. How do you factor that into what we did this year? I just don't know that there's that much that carries over.

Every year you learn things that you want to fix and get better at, and we've already started to address things this year that we feel like we can address and get better with.

Our mindset is that we're going to do the things we need to do to try and get better next year. Not that it won't be challenging under the cap situation, but our mindset hasn't changed.

Q. What all options are available to you to try to get that \$41 million figure down for Ben? How do you handle that?

ART ROONEY II: Well, look, I think that those are discussions we'll have with Ben and his representative. Obviously it takes two to figure that out, and whether we can agree with what he wants or vice versa, we'll just have to see.

Q. I was curious about the hire, the promotion of Matt Canada to offensive coordinator. I know you guys interviewed several candidates. Was Matt always the frontrunner for the job to promote internally, and what did you like about what he was doing with only one season in the NFL? What made him the best fit?

ART ROONEY II: Matt obviously was our internal candidate that we knew very well. Mike obviously interviewed a couple other coaches that he felt good about, felt they were good candidates, and I think they were. But at the end of the day felt like Matt was the best fit for us.

Really I think some of the kinds of things that you're seeing in offenses around the league we need to employ in our offense. We did some of that this year. At times we got away from it, and that may have contributed to some of the inconsistency we had in the offense.

We look forward to Matt coming in and really having another year to put his system in place, and we think he'll do a good job.

Q. You mentioned the salary cap situation in regards to Ben. What is the timeline on that to your understanding with the league in terms of when they're going to come out with something on that? And are you kind of playing this differently than other years? Is it much different than other years?

ART ROONEY II: Well, we expect it to be much different, let's put it that way. I wish I could tell you I knew the time frame of it, but I don't. I think we're going to start to hear some things next year, but I don't know. I mean, I assume that we'll know something by the middle of February, and that'll give us the opportunity to have some time to think through what we need to do.

But I think it's fair to say that this will probably be the most difficult salary cap challenge that we've had in a long time, maybe ever, and so it's going to be a busy off-season, that's for sure.

Q. You mentioned if you could have the same roster back, you would. Obviously that's not going to be the case because of some of the guys entering free agency. What gives you optimism that you can close the gap on the teams that you're chasing, teams with younger quarterbacks and teams with more cap flexibility than you're going to have?

ART ROONEY II: Well, I mean, look, the roster we had this year was, I think, a strong enough roster for us to compete with many of those teams you referenced. I thought we played two very good teams in our division pretty tough this year in the Ravens and the Browns and belonged on the same field with them.

In terms of changes going forward, I think obviously we're going to have to make changes. Based on the salary cap we're going to have adjustments this year. We still have, I think, the makings of a very strong defense going into next year, and probably most of the adjustments we're going to have to make will be on the offensive side.

Whether we get it done right or not, we'll find out. It's going to be a challenge.

Q. I think a year ago at this time under different circumstances we heard you say exactly the same thing about the running game, that it wasn't good enough, that it's got to be better, and obviously it wasn't any better. So what's going to be different this off-season to get that running game where you want it

to be?

ART ROONEY II: Well, I think we've already started to make some changes to address that, and there are more to come. I think we obviously are going to have probably some changes on the roster at running back this year with James being a free agent. There's no question it's something that we have to address.

I think everybody in the building agrees that you can't finish 32nd in the league in running and feel you're going to have a successful season.

Q. Along those lines, you mentioned changes. Do you have to change what you do and who you do it with with the run game? Is that the goal?

ART ROONEY II: You know, I'd say we have to start with a commitment to the running game, and that's something that I'm not sure we've always had. So as we look at changes to the coaching staff, I think that'll be part of the mindset.

Again, in terms of the people in this building at this point, I think everybody understands we're going to have to be better than that. Again, I think that that contributes to the inconsistency that we saw on offense. At times we had an outstanding passing game, and Ben at times was almost unstoppable. But we didn't always have four quarters where we were being successful at it.

We know, I think, what kind of work we have to do, and hopefully we'll be able to get it done.

Q. How do you evaluate Mike's season this year? I guess he's entering the last year of his contract. Are there any plans to pick up the option or extend him?

ART ROONEY II: You know, we'll address Mike's contract with him as time goes on this off-season. I'll just say I feel comfortable in saying that he'll be our coach into the future.

In terms of the job he did, obviously we didn't finish the way we'd like. The playoff game, again, it's hard to analyze exactly what we did there in terms of just turning the ball over that way. You're not going to win very many games.

I don't really see how you attribute that to coaching preparation. I think the team went into that game prepared and felt like we were going to win. We certainly -- it wasn't one of those things where we came out flat or anything like that. You just can't turn the ball over.

So in terms of the overall season, you know, we set a franchise record starting out 11-0, won our division, so

those are the positives. The way we finished was not one of the positives. I know Mike feels as bad about that as any of us and is determined to do what we need to do to fight to get back into having another opportunity to win the division and move on.

Q. Just to clarify about Ben Roethlisberger's status, to be determined? You're sure he'll be back in some way, shape or form? Or can you envision a scenario where he's not the Steelers' quarterback next year?

ART ROONEY II: You know, I don't want to go too far down that road because, as I said, we have a lot of discussions to have both internally and with Ben before we can make any decisions on that front.

So I think that the salary cap situation and Ben's contract is a big factor in where we go, and that's probably as much as I can say about it right now.

Q. With the cap going down again and some vets unsure and you might have to be forced to cut some of the players you have right now, you have a ton of free agents the next two years, RFAs, UFAs; was there any thought of just going into a rebuilding mode now?

ART ROONEY II: You know, we've got to look at the whole roster, obviously, in the context of this year's cap and make decisions on it. But I would just say that we're going to try and build a championship team to go into next year. Whether we can do that or not remains to be seen, but we're not going to sit here and say, Okay, we're three years away. I mean, we're just not going to look at it that way.

We're going to put the best team on the field that we can next year and do our best to compete to, number one, win that division and move on.

Q. Obviously one of the reasons the cap is projected to go down is the lack of revenue from the pandemic. Do you see in Pittsburgh the revenue loss from not having ticket sales and that kind of thing impacting the way you guys are able to do business going forward?

ART ROONEY II: You know, I don't see it as an impact on how we're going to approach this year. Obviously we're hoping that we get back to something closer to normal going into the 2021 season.

You know, if that happens, I don't sense that it's going to be a dramatic shift in the way we do business.

Q. I know Kevin has been going year to year with his contract. Has he given you any inclination of what

he's thinking about for next year?

ART ROONEY II: Well, Kevin and I have had some conversations and we'll have more conversations about it. I will have to just say we'll let you know as soon as we've come to some conclusions.

Q. Looking at the quarterbacks you have on the roster right now, whenever Ben is done, are you comfortable with the quarterback succession plan, or is there a possibility of looking at acquiring one of the big free agent quarterbacks that's on the market? And when it comes to Ben and his retirement, is this something where the organization may need to step in and say, Hey, it's time, or does he have the ability to write the end to his story at this point?

ART ROONEY II: Well, let's see. I'll just start by saying, again, with Ben, we need to have conversations with him about the end of his career, and we intend to do that.

In terms of the quarterbacks we have on the roster now, you know, we'll start with Mason Rudolph. We are comfortable that he's a quarterback that can play in this league and be a starter in this league. And obviously beyond that we just signed a young player, you know, who knows, but we'll see if he develops in Dwayne Haskins.

But I think when you look at our room, we obviously are going to have to add somebody to the room here this off-season, and so we'll look at all the opportunities we have to do that.

Q. Another round of hires across the league this year. Head coaching wise, I think Robert Sala was the only minority coach that was hired. The league looks like it's trying to explore different avenues to make sure this isn't an issue going forward. Big picture wise what is your level of concern and what more can the league do to encourage owners to have more diverse head coaching hires?

ART ROONEY II: Look, we're going to look at it again as we did last year in terms of what transpired this year. There's still work to be done in this area, no question about it. We didn't make as much progress on the head coaching side as we would have liked.

But I would say we did make some progress on the general manager side, which is encouraging. And then we'll have to look on the coordinator side to see how much progress we make on that front.

There are a lot of pieces to it that we're going to have to sit down when it's all said and done and really analyze what

happened and are there things we can do to strengthen the opportunities for minority coaches.

I think last year we did take a number of steps that I think over time are going to pay dividends, but that's not to say we can't do more, and we'll take another strong look at it this off-season.

Q. Following up a little bit, since Kevin operates on a year-to-year basis, is there a succession plan in place? You've got some viable in-house candidates. What's the plan there should Kevin decide he wants to call it a career?

ART ROONEY II: You know, the only thing I'll say is yeah, I think we have viable internal candidates. But if Kevin decided not to continue on, I think we'd look at opening up the situation and doing a search and deciding if our internal candidates were stronger than candidates that might come in from the outside.

I think that it remains to be seen how we'll approach that, and I kind of feel like Kevin is going to come back, but who knows.

Q. Without twisting this Ben thing 20 different ways, I'm not so sure you've been asked or heard this from you: All things being equal, do you want Ben back?

ART ROONEY II: You know, I think we'd like to see Ben back for another year if that can work, but as we've said, there's a lot of work to be done to see if that can happen. There may need to be decisions that are made on both sides for that to happen.

Q. With the unusual nature of what happened this year with the cap, moving forward do you have to change or alter how you structure new contracts and how you restructure guys? Is there any change that has to be made there?

ART ROONEY II: You know, I think it's fair to say that we may have to look at doing some things different just based on the size of the challenge we have going into this year. So I'm not going to say that this is just going to be business as usual under these circumstances. It's going to be a very unusual year, a very difficult year from a cap standpoint, and so we'll really have to look at if there are adjustments that we need to make to how we structure contracts. We may have to look at that.

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