

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Kevin Colbert

Mike Tomlin

Weekday Press Conference



KEVIN COLBERT: He can also play in the passing game both as a receiver and a blocker. He's a three-down NFL back. He played in an NFL system and really his one hidden trait is he finds invisible yards at that second level. There's times where you think he should just be going down and all of a sudden he finds six, seven, eight yards. It's just really exciting to get what we think is a three-down back and add him to the team. Coach?

MIKE TOMLIN: I share Kevin's sentiments. Not a lot to add. I think a significant component that hadn't been mentioned, though, is his professional level of conditioning. He's a guy that comes to us with a professional level of conditioning along with his pedigree. I think that could be a catalyst for him to be an immediate component to our offense and to our team.

A lot to be excited about tonight.

Q. Kevin, was he identified by you guys almost immediately as the guy you wanted if you got to that 24th pick?

KEVIN COLBERT: Again, we were very excited that he was there for us. When we went through our scenarios, it was an easy decision by us to say, if Najee Harris is available, we will pick him. He's an exciting player, and like we said, he's a three-dimensional running back coming from a professional offensive system.

He's made NFL runs his whole career, and it was easy to identify him quite honestly. I got to see him live myself this year. We had six live looks at him during the course of the season between myself and the scouts, and every time we talked about him, we were excited that again, this caliber of player would be available to us.

Q. Did you guys get to talk to him at all at the pro days that Alabama had, and did you gain anything from that experience there?

MIKE TOMLIN: We had several opportunities to visit with him but not at the pro day. Kevin and the scouting department had an opportunity to visit with him in Mobile. I had an opportunity to participate in that remotely. And then we had another Zoom opportunity later in the process, and we were really comfortable with getting an opportunity to get to know him under those circumstances.

KEVIN COLBERT: In addition to that, at the pro days this year we weren't able to talk to players in one-on-one type interviews because of the COVID protocols that we had to follow. But in Najee's -- Najee did a really cool kind of thing because he was flying back for the pro day that he was not going to participate in because he was still coming off of an ankle injury that he had worked his way through during the season. His flight got delayed in Dallas and he decided to drive and be available and just watch his teammates at their pro day, and that really struck a chord with Coach and I. Again, we couldn't interact with him, but to watch him interact with his teammates while they were going through their pro days was truly special, and we had a few folks go back down for the second pro day when he did do some work.

Q. From what you saw of him, what do you feel makes him a No. 1 feature back?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, he's got a nice combination of size, strength and athleticism. His picking vision is excellent in terms of finding holes. He shows patience while doing that. He's a complete back. He's very good in the passing game, whether it's routes out of the backfield or aligning outside the backfield. There's not a lot of holes in his overall game, and I think those are the things that made him an attractive selection as you mentioned.

Q. You mentioned that it was an easy decision playing out the scenarios if Najee was available, he was a guy you were going to take. Does the depth of the offensive line class, particularly looking at the offensive tackles, make that an easier decision knowing you can still get some good value on the line in day two and some of those later picks?

KEVIN COLBERT: Coach and I were talking on the way

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down, to be able to get a player like that at that pick without having to trade up was exciting because now we still have -- we have seven picks left, and there's a lot of good players left at a lot of positions.

We'll redo some things and take a look at what we're looking at tomorrow, but we're excited about the depth that's left.

Q. How tight was it or what separated Harris from Travis Etienne?

KEVIN COLBERT: Well, we're never going to comment on the player other than the one we took, and again, complete back in our opinion. There's nothing really to add to it. It was a pick that we were excited to make. We'll never talk about other players.

There's several other players at different positions, at the same position, and hopefully they have great NFL careers, as well, but we're happy, ecstatic actually, about getting Najee.

Q. In your pre-draft conference you said that most Hall of Fame running backs come in the first round. Do you see that in Najee? Did you see that when you evaluated him?

KEVIN COLBERT: Didn't quite get him a gold jacket yet, but I said that in reference to the popular kind of thinking that running backs are devalued because of the offensive schematics that are going on in our game and in the -- at the college level.

I've been fortunate to have been around two Hall of Fame runners in Jerome Bettis and Barry Sanders, and I don't think you can ever devalue greatness at the running back position. Is Najee going to be a great player? We hope so. But we selected Najee because we think he's an NFL player that's going to help us win.

Q. You talked about on Monday really the thing that you look for on draft day is whether you are going to trade up or trade back, you're not really messing with the board there. Was there any temptation given the way things were falling to do either of those things tonight?

KEVIN COLBERT: No, we'll identify -- this year we identified eight players that if they were available to us we would take them and not consider a trade, and Najee was one of those players.

So again, ecstatic that he was there for us at 24.

Q. Following up on Kevin's comments about that theory that you wait on a running back, is that at all a theory that the team subscribes to, or is Najee just so special that he supercedes that?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, we don't subscribe to the theory that you mentioned, as Kevin so obviously stated. He was a player that we really valued. We were ecstatic that he was there, and we took him and we took him pretty quickly with little to no dialogue. We're extremely happy with where we are this evening.

Q. Obviously what Harris is able to do on the field is completely evident, but what impressed you guys the most about his off the field abilities, his character, things along those lines?

KEVIN COLBERT: You know, Najee decided to stay in school and go back for his senior year, which is going against the trend in college football right now. He did that, and he won a National Championship. Obviously Alabama had a lot of great players, him being the sixth one taken in the first round, but he was a huge part of that.

I think obviously that was done because he had ability, but he also made the decision that he was going back to try to win a championship, which they did.

We'll get to know him more. Again, we didn't get to interact with the players like we like to, but we were comfortable in the three interactions that we did have with him, albeit the third one just watching him work with his teammates.

He's a West Coast young man, and he went to school in the southeast, and he's going to play football in the north. We're excited. I think he's excited, and can't wait to see him get here.

Q. This is sort of a unique draft year with the information and everything, with the combine and all that. From your perspective was there maybe more activity or less activity in terms of calls, teams trying to move up or down or anything from what you guys could tell?

MIKE TOMLIN: Not in our draft room. Not out of the ordinary in terms of the volume of calls.

Q. For either one of you, how do you weigh with a running back like Najee the workload that he had in college? Is that always a pro in terms of he can handle that many carries, or do you have to balance that with just he's been used a lot already?

KEVIN COLBERT: He has, and I think that's to his credit.



Sometimes you look at that and say, well, the wear and tear, he's already got this many carries, but I always look at it the other way. He was a durable player, again, in an NFL-type running offense in what is one of the toughest leagues in college football. I view it as a positive because he was very durable for Alabama.

Q. You guys have new coaches on the offensive line, new coordinator, new lineman in Najee now. Is that good enough in your eyes to turn around the running game, or do you need to do more?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, it's our intentions to turn around the run game. Whether or not our work is complete as we sit here tonight in that regard or not, whether it's the acquisition of players, the development of schematics, the finding of cohesion within our staff, all of that is irrelevant in terms of completeness tonight. Our intentions are to improve our running game.

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