

# Pittsburgh Steelers

## Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

### Kevin Colbert

### Mike Tomlin

#### Draft Press Conference



acquire talent, free agency and then the Draft, we think that free agency has really set us up nicely to have a good draft.

**Q. Have you guys changed your best available philosophy over the years to more best available for need, or is it still the best guy out there on your board?**

KEVIN COLBERT: We always have approached it the same way. When free agency began, obviously that creates some situations where you try to fill in certain holes through that period, as Coach mentioned. We thought we did some of that. And anytime we have draft preparations and two players are close, if you have strength at one position and not another, and the players are close, you obviously will take that player where your strength isn't as good.

Again, you'll make a huge mistake if you reach down low in your developments and on your boards for players that are not quite as good, because what looks like a position need at a certain time can change instantly. And we have to recognize that and just try to take the best players available if it's not close.

**Q. Kevin, I want to thank you for your professionalism and cooperation over the years, first of all. Question is for Coach. Mike, you obviously have a lot of centers in your fold now. Is there any mindset right now as to is there a default guy, or are you just going to let that all play out over the summer?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We are going to let it play out. It's good to have position flexibility. So we have got some guys that are capable. It's important to have not only a starter-capable guy but some depth, and we just feel good about the list of candidates that we have.

**Q. The topic of wide receiver is the boom that we've seen in contracts this off-season. Does that speak to the importance of the onus of getting good quality wide receivers on their first contract and maybe loading up on guys on their first contract to fill some of those positions?**

KEVIN COLBERT: I think that's irrelevant to the position.

KEVIN COLBERT: As I said at those pre-owners meetings, the Senior Bowl, the exposure that myself and the scouts had in the fall, we scouted with that intent to see games live, Senior Bowl, the pro days, the visits, try to wrap it up. But we would usually do that at all other positions, more specific to the ones that you might be zeroing in on.

**Q. When you're looking at quarterback position now, obviously with the tragedy that happened with Haskins, does that affect your decision, you and Kevin, going in, whether you're going to draft a QB maybe a little bit higher in the draft?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, in regards to Dwayne, our energies have been on paying proper respect and supporting his family. We have not approached it from a business decision or a business decision-making standpoint. We feel like that's the appropriate mindset for us to have as we sit here today.

**Q. Can you talk about the moves you've done since free agency and how will that play into what you do or don't do in the draft?**

MIKE TOMLIN: How so? What do you mean?

**Q. Just the positions.**

MIKE TOMLIN: Our goal always is to address all needs so we can kind of let the field come to us in the draft and we feel comfortable that we have quality, capable guys at each and every position. And that's what we desire, and that way we can go into the Draft and not feel undue pressure in terms of reaching positionally, etc.

So we had a very productive free agency period. We are excited about the guys that we are able to acquire. Obviously just beginning to get to know them as professionals and football players, but in terms of how we

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We have always talked about -- our top three picks, they have to become starters in the business model that we follow because you have to have so many players fit into so many categories.

When you miss on a player in those rounds, which we have, you end up spending more money trying to replace them in free agency. And we are always cognizant of what goes on at a different position and its impact on a salary cap, and hopefully you have some players that are worthy of that type of consideration.

But that comes back to, you know, what we're about to do on Thursday in trying to make the best picks possible.

**Q. If I can piggyback off of that a little bit, as we see wide receivers -- as we see wide receiver classes get deeper, and we see the wide receivers more developed as they come out of the college game, what distinguishes a wide receiver who is still worth paying, let's say, 22, 23, \$24 million? What separates that guy when there is so much depth at that position now?**

KEVIN COLBERT: Again, I think the depth is undefined until they get to this level. And any player at any position that we desire to pay, we feel he better be special at his position and maybe exceed where he was drafted and just recognize what they have accomplished at this level.

Again, I think we can do that at any given position for that special player within that group.

**Q. When we talked to you before owners meetings, you said you believe you have a starting-caliber player at every position except strong safety. How did you come together with Terrell's side to bring him back into the fold, and do you still view that as a position of need going into the Draft?**

KEVIN COLBERT: We were open and honest with Terrell throughout the whole process as he was with us. We were able to stay connected and see where it all went. We didn't know where the market would be; he didn't. We always encourage our free agents, look, it's going to better serve you to go out and find out what else is there. And that's part of the decision-making. Understand that we are doing the same thing on our side.

Fortunately, he's coming back to us, and he gives us that 20-second starter, so to speak. And when we say that, you know, I want to emphasize, we are not saying we're good enough, we're saying we have NFL veteran starters at each position. And the Draft process will provide great competition for that, but it isn't like any of these young men that we drafted will come in and be ordained a starter.

I know Coach doesn't do that ordinarily, but when you don't have great depth or what you believe to be a starter, sometimes those guys have to play a little quicker than possible -- or than desirable, and we like to avoid that.

Again, to Coach's other point on the free agency, anything we did in free agency is not going to preclude us from drafting a player at that position.

**Q. You said you felt good about the process leading up. Did you also feel good about the in-person quarterback meetings in finding what you were looking for, and do you need to pick a quarterback in this year's draft?**

KEVIN COLBERT: I know I feel good about the process. Again, Coach and I met more with that position than we have, as I referenced earlier, and we spent time with them. Our offensive coaches, Coach Sullivan, Coach Canada, they spent more time with individual meetings.

And look, quarterback is the most critical position in our sport, and we have to get that right. Could we add somebody? Yes. Could we start the season without adding anybody? Yes. And we'll see where it all goes.

Coach?

MIKE TOMLIN: Yeah, really nothing to add. You know, I enjoy the process of having heightened urgency for a position. Seemed like a year ago we chopped up the running backs in a similar way. I know that the process we've gone through in terms of getting to know the quarterback pool is getting some attention, but it's not an irregular process for us in terms of, you know, locking in and getting a feel for a certain pool within the pool, if you will.

**Q. Mike, as this week winds down for you, I'm sure there's excitement building for the Draft itself. Is there a little bittersweetness there, though, knowing it's the last time you'll go through it with the guy sitting next to you?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I've tried not to think about it, you know, to be quite honest with you. It went through my mind a little bit some when we were traveling because we've just had such great times over the years traveling and gathering information, necessary information, to get to know the young men.

But we've been up against it pretty good and hustling, so there hasn't been a lot of those moments, but obviously it has been a pleasure to work alongside him and, you know,

we'll see where the roads lead us.

**Q. When it comes to the running back depth, what's the expectations for Benny and Anthony McFarland this season, and what's the level of desire to add to the group behind Najee?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Both capable young guys. Their resumes speak for themselves. Benny has been capable as a backup runner, has been capable as a teamer. McFarland less so, less availability there. But they will define their roles with how they perform and obviously how they perform against competition, competition that's here and maybe competition that's not here.

**Q. You talked about how -- at George's pro day about how guys didn't expect Jordan Davis to be around long enough for you guys to get him at 20. What is the expectation, looking at this class, if you're able to get a dynamic defensive playmaker if you stayed home at 20 versus if you would need to trade up to get a player like that this year?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We always talk about not speculating what others are going to do because it's fruitless, if you will. We'll put together our board here in the next 24 to 48 hours in totality. And as they come off, they come off, and we'll see what's available to us. And we'll ponder some of those possibilities, staying put, moving up, moving down, etc.

But we just like our process, and we focus our energies on what it is that we do and less so about the potential of what others might do.

**Q. Any further clarity on Stephon Tuitt?**

MIKE TOMLIN: No. No updates, but he's doing well.

**Q. Voluntary workouts, anything like that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: No updates.

**Q. And, Kevin, have you allowed yourself to smell the roses?**

KEVIN COLBERT: No, not at all, honestly. Just to echo Coach's comments, listen, it's been a great process to work with Coach. You don't take those things for granted. He loves this part of the process, and that always makes it an easier endeavor.

It's fun to be out and watch him interact with these young men and their families, and the respect that he commands on the road, it's very impressive. And the information that he comes away with that I might have missed is very

helpful. It's been a nice working relationship, but it's been more than that.

MIKE TOMLIN: No doubt.

KEVIN COLBERT: You share the highs, you share the lows, and it's been great. But quite honestly, we haven't had the time to think about that. Now, I think that time will come whenever it comes, but right now we've got to get this thing right, and that's what we are focused on.

**Q. After doing virtual visits the last couple years and coming back, have you guys changed anything about the process or the way that you do in-person visits, added anything or tweaked that at all?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think that, you know, we are not resistant to change, but we don't change for the sake of changing.

Like in a lot of circumstances, I think the pandemic has taught us some valuable lessons. I think that there's a lot of information to be gleaned from Zoom meetings, so that's become a component of some of the things that we do. Just because you have 30 visits, in-person visits, you don't necessarily have to utilize them.

So that's kind of the evolution from a mentality standpoint that we've gone through based on what's transpired.

**Q. Coach Tomlin, you're obviously unbelievably thorough in general in your process, but having had the seven quarterbacks here, did any of them change your mind in any way? Was there anything learned in having them in your building beyond your exposure to them out at their buildings?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, I don't know that we established a strong enough opinion regarding anything to say that something changed our mind. I think at the outset, we formulated a plan to have as many interactions with these guys as we could in an effort to gain a complete understanding of who they are as people and as players.

So at the very beginning, there was an anticipation that we would, you know, have some interactions in Mobile, we would have some indicator actions in Indy, we would travel to the university cities and have that interaction centered around their pro day, and then we also had planned to bring them in.

And so I don't know that I was formulating enough of an opinion at any point in the process because I had an understanding of what we intended to do from a totality standpoint.

**Q. You mentioned earlier that you're willing to trade up, trade down. Past drafts, how many of those moments have come that have never come to fruition in terms of maybe you guys have tried to move up and it didn't facilitate that way or teams wanting to move up to your spot and you neglected that? Does that happen often?**

KEVIN COLBERT: That's a lot to try to recall.

MIKE TOMLIN: Every year.

KEVIN COLBERT: When we go into it, we will have touched base with every team above us, below us; hey, they are interested in moving up, they are interested in coming out. We'll guesstimate what it will cost to move from 20 to 7 and then from 20 back down to 32, and you're always making those assessments.

But we can always say what we gave up for Troy, a 3 and a 6, to move up more spots than we gave up to move for Antonio, we gave up a 3 and a 4, and I forget how many spots we moved, maybe four, but in those of those endeavors, both those moves helped us win a Super Bowl.

That's where we never will lock ourselves into -- they have got draft charts with the numbers and this is a good deal and not a good deal. I think you can determine all that only after the fact.

So we will be knowledgeable of what it will cost, and we will decide as it unfolds. I never want to trade for a specific spot without knowing a specific player, or if you go back to Casey Hampton, when we traded back, we traded back three spots, we had three people, Casey included, who was the top of those three that we would have felt good about.

So we are always making those decisions, but it's never black and white.

**Q. Going to test your memory, 22 of these, is there any you look at now and say, yeah, we got that one right or that was my favorite of any of the Drafts?**

KEVIN COLBERT: Not really. I mean, again, obviously the ones that helped you win Super Bowls, those, but I can't say which part of which one because different guys came out of different drafts. I mean, Brett Keisel was a seventh rounder, Heath Miller was a first. I can't really say there's one specific one. There's too many to look back on.

And maybe there's not enough to look back on, too, because Coach and I are never going to be satisfied with

what our results were or are to this point. I hope this one's the best one.

**Q. Every first-round pick carries pressure that comes with it, quarterback to a far greater degree. And you have a guy in your building now who was a number two overall pick, and it didn't work out in his first spot for whatever reason. When you're evaluating quarterbacks, how much of a sense do you really get whether they can handle that added layer of pressure, and do you have to maybe just trust your gut when you're looking at guys in that position?**

KEVIN COLBERT: Man, it's comprehensive. I mean, myself and the scouts, we got to see all these quarterbacks live at least two, sometimes three, sometimes seven times. We've seen them live so you try to judge that based on how they appear in a game, in a stadium, on the sidelines talking to their teammates, talking to their coaches.

We follow that up with those individual interviews, and Coach and his staff will ask them certain questions. And I'll let Coach address that as to how are you going to handle this. You're coming from a small media market, Pittsburgh is a small town, but this is a big football environment, how do you anticipate this. Some of these guys have never been this far east. That was kind of enlightening. But I'll let Coach kind of follow up on that.

MIKE TOMLIN: I think that's why we laid out such a comprehensive process in an effort to gather as much information and get to know these guys as well as we could because some of the things you suggested are not football related but personality related. Some people are introverted, extroverted, and settings such as this are draining for them, etc.

So for us, it was, yes, getting to know them as players, but just as significant a component of it, particularly as it pertains to some of the things that you suggest, was getting to know them as young people as well.

**Q. A lot of change this off-season, a new general manager, replacing a franchise quarterback and new coordinator. How can that amount of change be positive for you and what's your mindset approaching that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I acknowledge that change is a component of our business each and every year. So from that perspective, I don't view what's transpired this year as any different. I acknowledge that there is some angst, if you will, regarding some of the changes and uncertainty.

But that's always positive fuel for me. I'm a glass-half-full



guy, and I'm always excited about the platform that transition could provide us in terms of getting better.

**Q. As you evaluate defensive backs, are you seeing some of the hybriding that we've seen, like safety to inside linebacker when it comes to safety and corner, are you kind of seeing that proliferation of passing game in college influencing that position as you've talked about many times with inside linebacker and safety?**

MIKE TOMLIN: What you see is specialization. You're seeing guys that are nickels and guys that are dime linebackers, if you will. And it's specialization as it pertains to the passing game or winning possession down or situational football.

So that's exciting to get a feel for some of that. I know years ago when I was a secondary coach, you were forecasting whether or not someone was nickel capable, if you will. I think you fast forward 20 years now, and there are guys that define themselves as nickels.

And so that's what I mean when I'm talking about the elevated specialization. From my perspective, that's a fun element of their evaluation, to look at some of the things, the specialized skill sets and things that are now embraced and are continually embraced in our game.

**Q. Do you have to make a decision from time to time between a player who you think you have a real good beat on and his ceiling is here and another guy whose ceiling is through the roof freshman but you're not sure if he'll ever get there, and what governs that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Certainly. I think in a lot of ways that discussion is weighed, we call it the ceiling and the floor, how high is the floor and how low is the ceiling, if you will.

The potential component, particularly if you're talking about young people, third-year juniors and so forth, depending on the person and the circumstance, is a portion of the discussion and sometimes a significant portion of the discussion.

**Q. Other than a victory on Super Bowl Sunday, where does Draft Day round one rank for you from an excitement standpoint? And a month or so ago, you were talking about fresh ideas in your role. How have you seen the evaluation process change in the 20-something years you've been doing it?**

KEVIN COLBERT: The first round is obviously always exciting. It's become a day of itself, which, you know, I'm not crazy about. We would like to do all seven rounds in

one day, but we understand it's not. And those guys should be celebrated because they are 1 of 32 of a thousand guys you may have started the process with. So the first round will always be exciting.

**Q. How has it changed for you?**

KEVIN COLBERT: The change we talked about, fresh ideas. Look, there's -- obviously the analytical world is big, and it's getting bigger, and we respect that and we understand it and we work within it. But it's never going to exchange -- it's never going to take over for the evaluation. It never did in my world. Coach understands it and respects it.

You know, we acknowledge the analytic side more so in the pro side of things when you're comparing apples to apples. Our friends in the baseball world pointed that out to us. The amateur scouting for them, they can't really use the analytics because they are comparing high school, junior college, college, Minor League players, whatever. And we're the same way.

Yeah, we'll acknowledge that, yeah, this guy has a certain percentage of a catch -- run after the catch and so on and so forth. But who did he do it against on what Saturday?

So that world is evolving. I think it's valuable, but I think it also has to have some guidelines to go along with it. The fresh ideas will be there, but hopefully the people with the fresh ideas have an understanding of what really is important, and it's what happens on that field on a given Saturday.

**Q. You talked about specialization. How is that pertaining now to slot receivers, and is it almost like you've got two different groups of receivers with guys that are specializing in one versus the other, and how is it weighed in this year's class?**

MIKE TOMLIN: There are certainly some guys that identify themselves as slots just like I was discussing there are some guys that identify themselves as nickel corners and maybe didn't have that ten years ago. But you also still see the versatility opponent where guys are slot capable but also outside capable.

You know that we value versatility and flexibility. But there's a lot to choose from at the receiver and those that cover receiver positions in the draft. It's just, you know, we've been having this discussion continually over the last several years.

You know, it can be traced to a lot of things, the 12-month cycle that will be football now, the seven-on-seven, the skill

development associated with those things. You're just seeing a lot of options in those spaces.

**Q. You talked about thinking about this being Kevin's last draft, specifically when you guys were traveling, doing things like that, is there a routine or anything you guys would do before you go out to a visit or anything that made you think about those things?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We eat a lot.

(Laughter.)

We sample regional dining, depending on where we are (laughing).

But there's a method to that, as well. We enjoy the informal settings of breaking bread with the young people in their towns and getting to know them, and hopefully that's a setting where we can legitimately get to know them in a non-football way.

**Q. Got a favorite regional dining spot that you guys had to hit this year?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm a sweet tea guy. So there are certain regions of the country that have high-grade sweet tea. That's where I like to go.

**Q. You talked to us during the bye week about specifically studying mobility and quarterbacks. You talked about that a bit. Now that you've gone through this process and met with all these quarterbacks, for the first time in your tenure, you're not inheriting a franchise quarterback. Have you figured out what the most important trait to you in a quarterback is?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I haven't. I don't know that anyone has.

**Q. Are there a few? Can you give me two or three?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think that is the ultimate competitor's position. Those that run to and not from competition, those that embrace competition and the intensity of it, and the anxiety maybe associated with it, I think they have a leg up.

Obviously there are some pedigree-related things per the position, arm strength and accuracy. That's evident. Either it's present or it's not. The intangible quality associated with competition I think is something that's valuable.

**Q. I know you guys are only concerned about what you're going to do, but can you take us behind the**

**scenes a little bit this week when you put your draft board together, your mock drafts, do you guys have a good grasp of what the teams might do in front of you or educate a guess where you know a handful of players that might fall to you guys?**

KEVIN COLBERT: Honestly, no. And again, we did away with mocking other teams probably...

MIKE TOMLIN: 10?

KEVIN COLBERT: 12 years ago? We just said, I don't know why we do this. We are just guessing. And it doesn't matter. We mock ourselves. We're picking first who we take and we're picking -- that player is gone, we're picking second, who are we taking.

We go all the way down to 20 and we have guys lined up in the fashion that we will pick them, and then we will decide if we want to trade up or trade down. And that's based on that earlier why question; there's values to doing that.

Again, when we trade away a third and a sixth, are we trading away Emmanuel Sanders and Antonio Brown? We don't know. But we always try to put a player to that scenario.

So, no, we don't concern ourselves with anybody but else but ourselves. I know there's 20 players. By Wednesday, we'll know the order and we'll pick them, and we'll know who may or may not be interested in moving up or coming down, and we'll try to make the decisions as best we can.

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