

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Kevin Colbert

Mike Tomlin

Draft Press Conference



KEVIN COLBERT: Thanks again, everybody. Bring this draft process to an end. We talked about Kenny Pickett on Thursday evening. Just to follow up, when Kenny came in for his press conference and visitation yesterday, it just reaffirmed for myself the maturity and just the real good feeling you have about having Kenny Pickett be your quarterback with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Sometimes you take that for granted until you get the young men in the rooms, but it was great to see him and have him around.

George Pickens, the coaches talked about him. Pickens is a very, very talented young man. He suffered an ACL last spring. He fought his way back. It was very impressive. Sometimes players in those situations, they just shut it down, get healthy and prepare for the draft. He prepared to help Georgia down the stretch, and they used him in certain packages in their last few games and into the playoffs and championship game he made a big play.

But it was impressive to us how he responded, and instead of putting that injury, letting him put him on the shelf, he fought through it and became a national champion. We felt real comfortable with where he was with the rehab at his pro day, a couple months removed from the championship.

It was exceptional. He did a lot of things that we thought he would have been doing had he been healthy last season, so we're very encouraged about that.

DeMarvin Leal, this is a talented, inside-outside; he's moved all along the defensive line of scrimmage. We think he can play a number of positions, both in the base defense and in the sub-packages; quality interior rusher who also rushed from the outside last year; he's certainly a run defender, as well.

Calvin Austin, you're going to look at his size. He's smaller but he's extremely fast. I think he timed in the -- on our

watches, in the 4.4s at the combine, but what Coach reminded me of was this is a 200-meter guy. He's probably hitting his peak speed at 40 yards. He is exceptionally fast. He can play inside and outside. He doesn't have the ideal size to play outside, but he made plays for Memphis, both in the slot and outside, and he can return punts. I believe he has 29 for an 11-yard average.

Connor Heyward, obviously people understand who he is. First and foremost, that's not why we drafted him. Connor Heyward was a running back at Michigan State, and really I give Coach Tucker and his staff credit for taking Connor and using him in a different manner as an H-back tight end/fullback.

Connor has got exceptional ball skills, receiving abilities, for a big man. We're excited to see what he can do as a tight end, as an H-back, as a special teamer. I don't want to discount, this guy one time against the University of Maryland put up I believe it was 140-some yards in a game, so he's very, very talented. He's very versatile.

Mark Robinson is a real interesting story. Mark was a scholarship running back at Presbyterian University. Presbyterian dropped scholarships, so he looked for another opportunity and he went to southeast Missouri as a scholarship player.

Southeast Missouri during the COVID season didn't play, so he sought -- he did not want to sit out a whole year, so he had a friend, an ex-teammate from back home at the University of Mississippi that encouraged him to come down there.

He went there as a walk-on runner. They gave him some looks just on defense as a scout team player, and all of a sudden they're seeing, wait a minute, this young man can play defense. About midway through the season, he actually started nine games as an inside linebacker and really caught our attention. He has a real explosive tackling demeanor about him. He's a very, very interesting young man and really a self-made guy.

Chris Oladokun is another guy that he was a triple transfer and started off at South Florida, went to Sanford University, and then graduated from Sanford and took a grad senior

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year at South Dakota State and really did a nice job.

He ended up I believe it was 25 touchdown passes. We had good grades on him coming out of there. He played in the NFLPA game, and we decided, look, we wanted to add another quarterback to our roster, and this young man, we brought him in for a pre-draft visit, very mature, very smart, impressed us, not only on the field but with his off-the-field talents and intelligence and just demeanor.

That wraps up the picks. We'll be trying to sign free agents, as always, and scouts. We'll be working on that this evening and try to wrap it up and get ready for what's next. Coach?

MIKE TOMLIN: Yeah, I'd like to open by acknowledging this guy to my left here, his contributions to this organization for 22 plus years has been exceptional and needs no endorsement from me. I think it quite simply speaks for itself.

I've had an opportunity to come alongside this gentleman for 15 of those years, and I just want to say it has been an absolute pleasure, not only in terms of results but the process itself.

It's a pleasure to come alongside him and evaluate talent and make the critical decisions. There's a lot of challenges in our business, but the spirit in which you attack them is everything, and it's just been a pleasure to work with him.

His mark and impact on us will continue to be felt, played out in the lives of the men that we selected here today, and I just wanted to say that. Thank you for 15 quality years right here.

KEVIN COLBERT: And right back at the coach. I appreciate that, and believe me, it's been a special relationship.

You don't think about these things until you get away from the task at hand, but there will be time to reflect on it. But I share Coach's appreciation. Appreciate what he and his staff and his demeanor have done for this organization, and just can't say how happy I've been to be able to work beside Coach Tomlin for 15 of those 22 years, and of course Coach Cowher for those first seven.

We know what the task is and we've tried to accomplish that as best we can, but we just told the personnel department and the coaches it's time to start another year.

Again, appreciate everything, but it's time for 2022.

Q. Kevin, for even the tiniest moment when you made

that last pick, ironically at quarterback, did you even think for a moment, this is the last pick I'm going to make?

KEVIN COLBERT: It hit me for a minute --

MIKE TOMLIN: It's not in his DNA. We tried to take him there, and he led us maybe to the doorstep.

KEVIN COLBERT: No, you do think about that. Like I said, it'll hit you a little bit later. But it's like a game; when the game comes to an end, you appreciate it and you think about it, but you really will reflect on it when it gets quiet and you're by yourself and it's like, oh, wait a minute, what do I got to do next. I don't know.

But of course it means a lot. The last pick, again, we hope it's the best pick, and only time will tell.

Q. Mike, did you say anything to him after that last pick?

MIKE TOMLIN: To him? No, no. I know he's not going to break character. But he makes it easy to stay focused on the task at hand, which we all have done and will continue to do.

Q. Kevin, what are you going to do immediately? I know you're going to stay tied to -- not like you're moving away, but the last couple weeks, how are they going to be different than the last 22?

KEVIN COLBERT: Honestly, I don't know, because for 38 years we've been doing this. I've enjoyed every moment of it, and I don't know what's next. None of us do.

We'll move into that process, whatever the next step is, when Art decides to continue that search, and we'll see where it goes and how I may or may not be able to fit into it. I just want to make sure that, again -- I've said it before, whatever the next step is, if I can help and not hinder, great.

Q. Do you like how you left the franchise?

KEVIN COLBERT: I don't want to say better than. I'm proud that we've added to that room. It was four trophies -- there was four when we got here, and you knew the task.

You think about DMR, and being able to add to that room means a ton. But it doesn't mean it's over. The next step, I mean, we've got to get more than, and we'll never lose that. But it means a lot.

Q. Until a replacement is named, will you continue in



what you're doing the next week, months, however long it takes?

KEVIN COLBERT: Yeah, I would anticipate -- we'll see. Again, Art will address that and bring Coach and I up to speed. Coach will be more involved with the next wave. I made initial recommendations, and we interviewed some great people, including two great internal candidates. There's a lot of people that can do this. There's probably some that can do it better.

But there will be -- time will tell, and Art will dictate when that time is to move to the next step. He'll dictate how we want to go about it, how he wants to go about it, and ultimately he'll make that decision with whatever input he asks of us.

Q. Long-term, I'm not sure what's next, but immediately you have a dinner tonight or any kind of celebration that the draft is done, your last draft is done?

KEVIN COLBERT: Not really. I'll go back down to the room and make sure we get the free agents all wrapped up and button things up for tonight and go home and spend time with Janice, my wife, and see where life goes.

Q. Today specifically when you had the lull between -- about the fifth, was there anything you were hunting for that you would have liked to have gotten that you didn't have, a defensive back or an offensive lineman? Oftentimes you walk away from the draft with one of those --

KEVIN COLBERT: Yeah, every time you go into a draft you wish you had more than, and you reflect on why you didn't have that fifth-round pick. That was a swap of 5 and 7s with the Jets that we did for Avery Williamson after we had lost Devin Bush.

We traded for a veteran linebacker, and Avery did a nice job filling in that year. He gave us what he could. When you trade away a fifth that we did next year, that was for Ahkello Witherspoon, and he came in and gave us a year of service and now he's under contract for two more.

So you always reflect on what you got with that pick, and it makes up some of it when we didn't have the round pick that we had for Minkah. We're very comfortable in not having that pick and having Minkah.

So you understand there might be that lull and you wish you could have, but reality is you didn't.

Again, coming away with seven picks, it was good. Again,

that fifth or that seventh that we got back, that's for Oladokun.

Q. Lots of numbers at those positions, defensive back and offensive line, but the competition is capable there, a lot of value to it this weekend?

MIKE TOMLIN: Yeah, and we added to that mix in free agency. There's two ways we add to our talent pool, free agency and draft, and we felt really comfortable with what we were able to do with free agency in both rooms.

Q. When you called Connor Heywood, did you deliberately not want to tip off Cam?

MIKE TOMLIN: It was none of Cam's business. Cam just happens to be his big brother. But I say that and I mean it. Connor's resume speaks for itself. He's a Swiss Army knife. He's very talented. He has a nice skill set. He's a capable runner. He's a capable blitz pickup guy. He's very good in terms of the screen game, timing and feel. He made some plays down the field as a tight end in that offense. He's a physical guy.

We imagine that he could be an offensive contributor in teams, and so he was very worthy of that consideration, and I didn't want to water that down in any way by including big brother.

Q. You guys are up now to four sets of brothers; is that the cap on brother sets on this roster or will you find a couple more?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, we value the intangible quality, and when you're doing business with one, it probably gives you an indication about the intangible quality of the other. We're all continually trying to measure that which we cannot, and that probably is what drives us toward the brother game.

But the guys that we do business with, they're here on their own merits and their own capabilities. In some instances they just happen to be brothers.

Q. How much do you enjoy that part of this process, getting to make those phone calls?

MIKE TOMLIN: There's nothing like it. There's nothing like being a part of someone's story. I think Kenny said it, that phone call was a culmination of a life's work, and I have respect and appreciation for that. I make that call in that spirit.

Q. Mike, what are your thoughts on the two receivers you added, kind of their styles that they'll bring to your

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offense?

MIKE TOMLIN: Really excited about them. Very different guys, but you need differing skill sets in the receiving room. Kevin outlined Pickens and why we're excited about him.

Quite frankly we just think there's a heck of a lot more meat on that bone. His talent was very evident. His health was very evident at his pro day. We got a bird's eye view of an extended workout at that pro day, and we're really comfortable with what we saw, the things that he's been able to do, and the pedigree that he brings is exciting.

We were equally as pleased with Calvin. Calvin is a smaller guy, a start-stop guy, punt return capable. It seems like over the last several years the offensive skill position at Memphis, they've had a lot of dynamic playmakers, and he's just the latest. We're excited to add him. He brings a differing skill set, a guy that probably works inside as a potential jet sweeper and some of those things.

So we're excited about getting to know the things that we can anticipate them being good at but also not having them in a box and being open to being pleasantly surprised by some things that they might bring.

Pickens is a big guy that has little guy stop-start. We're excited about that, so we're not pinning him in a box in that way. Calvin is a little guy who made some plays outside down the field.

So we'll put those guys into the mix and coach them up, and we're excited about what they potentially bring us.

Q. Is it safe to say they bring some explosive components to the game?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think any time we're hunting at the receiver position that's what we're looking for. It comes just in varying shapes and sizes.

Q. Mike mentioned before about addressing the offensive line in free agency. Was that always the plan or is that where you felt more bang for your buck would be, the free agent offensive line and go somewhere else in the draft?

KEVIN COLBERT: I mean, when we went into the free agency, we had hoped for that. Again, coming away with two guys that are center guard capable and having Kendrick Green in that same talent pool is comforting because you have three guys that can play center and guard, and collectively it's nine years' worth of service we have from that group.

That lessened the desire to add to the interior to that, and there's only certain things you can do. Again, if we had more picks maybe you add more players, but we felt we wanted to add more players in different spots.

Q. Kevin, a more global question, but when you spoke after picket was selected, you spoke really highly of the quarterback class at large and Mike said it went around the globe and came back home to get picket. Were you a little surprised to see all those guys still on the board with as much homework as you had done on them?

KEVIN COLBERT: I was, and we were. We were just comforted to know that we had Kenny in the fold. Again, I'll repeat, that group is a quality group, and I suspect a lot of those players will come away as starters, and their team selected them when they selected them, and if it works out for them, great for them.

But I hope it works out for those young men, because it was a quality group. The one thing we didn't really talk about with Kenny, we put Kenny through the exact same process that we put the rest of those guys through just to make sure we didn't take anything for granted.

But in doing it, you learn so much about them, again, their families, their teammates, how their teammates respected them. It was a good group.

I was surprised. And again, sometimes things break differently, but while they were breaking, we were just comfortable in knowing that we had Kenny Pickett.

Q. You talked a lot about being invigorated about having a new quarterback or the challenge of it. Your offense as a whole, not just the quarterback, has kind of turned over the past two years. Is that the same feeling you've had going forward?

MIKE TOMLIN: I've just generally had that type of feeling this time of year because we're in the team building mode. I take nothing for granted in terms of what's transpired.

In some instances we might have familiar guys in familiar roles, but nothing stays the same. I work with an edge this time of year, with a level of excitement that anticipates some newness, whether it's new people or whether it's old people evolving in some way. Really excited about where we are and getting to work to kind of meet the challenges that await us.

Q. The moves made last night, those guys, even going back to high school, the five-star guys, is that a



coincidence --

MIKE TOMLIN: It is. We don't pay attention to the high school scouting services.

Q. Is that an indication of just kind of betting on the talent, like you said, I mean, high pedigree.

MIKE TOMLIN: They were a major SEC institution, so I would imagine that's just what comes with that.

KEVIN COLBERT: And both those players were graded very highly going into the whole draft process or coming out of the meeting process. We had them both valued very highly.

Q. A couple guys who were walk-ons and had to earn that, is that something you guys tended to gravitate toward? You have some already on the roster.

MIKE TOMLIN: I just think the whole discussion is a reflection of football justice. It doesn't matter by what means where you position yourself for draft eligibility. It's about your resume. It's about your body of work. It's about how you conduct yourselves.

We pride ourselves in being open and being pleasantly surprised, and sometimes it comes in the form of five-star guys. Arthur Millett used to always make a joke last year during the season that he was a zero-star guy, and boy, you got respect for that, as well.

I embraced the football justice component of it. It does not matter by what means you get here.

Q. The same thing you said, talk about the guy from South Dakota State at the FCS level.

MIKE TOMLIN: No question.

Q. Mike, assuming everybody shows up at OTA, one, who makes and who takes the first snap?

MIKE TOMLIN: I haven't even begin to think about that. We got so much more work ahead of us from a classroom perspective and things of that nature as we push into phase 2 and so forth of our off-season. That'll clear itself up I'm sure.

Q. Kevin, have you guys made any decision about Devin Bush?

KEVIN COLBERT: No. We wanted to get through this draft weekend and we'll talk about that on Monday. That's the deadline. We understand it has to be made by then,

but again, through this whole -- we were focused on this weekend and making sure we got this weekend right, and we'll make those decisions on Monday.

Q. You guys multiple times mentioned, talked about that Pickens decided to come back and play and fought his way back and played and could have taken the year off after his injury. Is that an intangible and a positive? Is it positive or negative to see the love of football?

KEVIN COLBERT: We understand what's going on in the college football world, and we don't begrudge anybody that decides not to play in their bowl games. I've said it, and Coach agrees, that we won't hold it against somebody.

But when someone does play in that game we give them extra credit, because that is an intangible quality that they're giving up for their team, and I think that's a huge value that when push comes to shove. We can trust that player to make that decision for us at whatever point that is.

George was no different than that. I mean, he had a serious injury. He made it back in an unusual short amount of time, and I give Georgia and Coach Smart credit for how they did that. He was practicing during the year on a limited basis.

I remember watching him there and understanding, okay, he might make it, and they used him in certain spots as much as they were comfortable with without risking further injury with him.

Again, by the time he got to his pro day he was about a year removed from that ACL and he was -- it was an exceptional display of his health.

Q. Was picking DeMarvin impacted at all by Stephon's availability or lack thereof?

KEVIN COLBERT: No. I mean, DeMarvin, we always wanted to be adding young defensive linemen. Cam is not getting any younger, Tyson is not getting any younger, and Stephon is right at that -- coming out of that prime age.

You've got to keep bringing youth. We did it last year with Loudermilk. It's encouraging to keep that young along that line, so when a guy like Leal was there, that wasn't a hard choice.

MIKE TOMLIN: You can never have enough young, high pedigree bigs.

Q. What do you think about Leal's versatility?

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MIKE TOMLIN: You know, his versatility is exciting, but I like his traits in general, his rush traits. He's dynamic. Man, I studied that Bama game significantly. That was a Sunday match-up. I thought he represented himself very well in that game.

Sometimes, oftentimes when you talk about versatility, you almost feel like you're slighting them from a pedigree standpoint, and this is a high pedigree guy with a bunch of talent.

Q. The depth at outside linebacker, is that concerning at this point, or could it be something you can address here in the next couple weeks?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, it's not overly concerning, but it's also something that we're capable of addressing.

Q. Is there any closer to a decision or timetable to a decision on what's going on --

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know that there's a timetable. I think we're comfortable with where we are and kind of from a calendar standpoint where he and we are all heading.

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