

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

Tuesday, July 26, 2022

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Coach Mike Tomlin

Weekday Press Conference



MIKE TOMLIN: Man, we're really excited to be here. It's awesome to get started. Let's talk about some observations. I just told the team I was really excited about a couple minor yet important things that I saw to this point. Number one, everyone was on time. Number two, everybody was appropriately conditioned.

I think those two things, although minor, are significant in terms of people displaying a willingness to contribute to what it is that we're doing here. To develop individually and to develop collectively, to divide the labor and grow, it starts there. In order to get the train out of the station, some fundamental things, some base things have to happen.

I like what I've seen from the group to this point in terms of their overall readiness in that regard.

Now we take off. A few health-related things. Minkah will be placed on NFI. He sustained a wrist injury on vacation. I think he fell off a bike. It will create some short-term discomfort, but I don't expect it to be an issue in the overall trajectory of his development and his place within this group and stadium availability and things of that nature. It's just going to create some discomfort for him at the early stages of this.

Tyson Alualu has been placed on PUP. He has a knee that's been swelling on him a little bit, probably from overtraining. Similar discussion as Minkah. We don't expect it to be significant from a long-term perspective but it will create some discomfort here at the early stages. We'll monitor those guys. There's some other guys with minor things that we'll manage from a rep standpoint but it won't affect their designation in terms of participation.

That being said, I'll pause and open it up for questions.

Q. Does Larry Ogunjobi get a clean bill of health and able to do everything?

MIKE TOMLIN: As you guys know, he's coming off

surgery. We exercise precaution because he's new here and new to us. So as we get to know him, we're going to proceed with caution so we get a better understanding of how his body works, so we take no steps backward as we proceed, so I wouldn't read too much into his lack of participation. It's really just more just to get to know.

Q. With Ogunjobi, do you see him as a nose who can help you out at end, or do you like him on the end with Tyson when he gets healthy playing the nose?

MIKE TOMLIN: I like him in both spots. But what we're talking about probably is 18 percent of our snaps. Today's NFL you spend so much time in sub package ball that we haven't wasted a lot of time talking about the oki or the base component of it because so little time is spent there. But there aren't any reservations in terms of his skill set that would limit him in terms of playing either position.

Q. But he's basically a sub package inside rusher?

MIKE TOMLIN: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q. How does Jeremy McNichols fit into the running back mix?

MIKE TOMLIN: We'll see. He's a guy that has an NFL resume. We've been in some stadiums with him in the past. We know that he's capable. He and others will be given an opportunity to kind of define their roles and divide the labor up as we get into it, but we're happy that he's with us.

Q. Is the quarterback depth chart the same to start camp as it was over the summer?

MIKE TOMLIN: It was, and I'll say this because I understand that's the elephant in the room. We're not going to micromanage or overmanage this quarterback competition. The depth chart will not rest on every throw. I know that you guys will want to ask me every day and every throw, but we're going to be a little bit more steady than that. I think it's important from a leadership perspective to not overmanage it, to not be too impulsive, so that's what I've relayed to those guys, and our actions will continue to display that mindset.



Q. When you saw the depth chart, what do you want to see out of Kenny Pickett in terms of being a rookie at that position in his first camp? Is there anything off-the-field leadership, anything intangible-wise you want to see from him?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm not overly concerned about that narrative. I think when you're 22, 23, 24 years old and you've been playing quarterback your whole life, you understand those informal responsibilities that come with the position. I'm more concerned about tangible things, accuracy, taking care of the ball and things of that nature.

I don't have any level of concern about those things being in his wheelhouse. I watched him do it next door in terms of leading his guys and being what we need quarterbacks to be. I don't think that's going to be a significant discussion.

Q. You talked about Najee Harris taking on a greater leadership role when you were on the Pivot podcast earlier this summer. How does he increase that beginning in this training camp?

MIKE TOMLIN: He doesn't have to do anything but be himself. I think that's an important component of leadership. I don't ask people to be something that they're not. It is naturally in his wheelhouse. It is something that just oozes off of him. It's just about he and us cultivating that and using that for our collective good.

Q. You've talked about the value of being here at St. Vincent College before. You guys haven't had that for a few years. Have you talked to the guys who have been here before for you guys about setting a tone or helping the guys adjust who haven't been here before?

MIKE TOMLIN: I haven't specifically, but the guys that you mentioned that fall into that category, I talk to them about a lot of things in terms of setting the tone and providing leadership. So those conversations are ongoing and continuous and they haven't happened specifically as it pertains to this location.

Q. On that Pivot podcast it got a lot of mileage locally. You boiled not having Ben down to scary but exciting. Can you elaborate on those?

MIKE TOMLIN: I meant what I said. It's scary because it's the unknown. We're venturing into a territory that we haven't been here in a long time from a quarterback perspective. At least for me personally, obviously I've always done the job with him.

But exciting also just because from a competitive standpoint you embrace challenges, and you're excited about the anxiety associated with that uncertainty.

So I thought I was pretty clear on that. I didn't think it needed any elaboration.

Q. You guys had success the last couple years even though you had to start the season back in Pittsburgh. What is it about this place? What does this place provide that training there does not?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's the opportunity to capture the intangible, that which we cannot measure, the informal time that going away to camp provides you, those moments where veteran guy gets a chance to spend time with young guy on the stoop out back at night or in between meetings or after dinner. I just think there's value in that, there's growth, there's collective growth in that, and I'm excited about what that environment provides us from that perspective.

Although you can't measure it, you acknowledge that it existed, and you acknowledge that it existed by working at it. That's what I'm challenging the team to do, to give of themselves, their time, their space, their knowledge, their experience while we're here, formally and informally.

Q. A lot of turnover this past year, coaching staff, front office, even players maybe more than normal. Is that labeled under the exciting part for you or do you have a little trepidation about that?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't worry about turnover. Turnover and transition is a component of our game at this level. There's turnover every year. So I haven't spent a lot of time focused on that component of it.

Each year we start anew. We assume nothing, and we acknowledge that there's some people on this journey that haven't been a part of past journeys, so you'd better not be too presumptuous about shared experiences.

Q. Other than quarterback what position competitions that start tomorrow kind of stand out to you?

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, all of them. I try to maintain an open mind in an effort to not miss an opportunity to get better or acknowledge something that's happening in front of us.

Q. Talking about the quarterbacks, how do you anticipate being able to share reps with three guys, and can that be a challenge?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm not overly concerned about it. I think



about every year we've been here, we've carried four guys into camp, and there have been some rep management things to address from that perspective. We've got four quarterbacks. We generally run in three groups. So there's some things to manage from a rep standpoint. But again, that has been the case for the 15 years or 16 years that I've been here.

Q. Any objective that you have or any expectations that you have for Bennie Snell or Anthony McFarland?

MIKE TOMLIN: No, much like we were talking about Jeremy, they'll be given an opportunity to carve out their roles. We acknowledge some of the things they've done in the past, positively, negatively. Build on the positive, minimize the negative. We'll see what this journey and this process of development holds for those men.

Q. Do you have to remind some of the younger guys that the Super Bowl is the goal, or do you anticipate them already knowing that?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't imagine that I would have to remind them but I do anyway.

Q. I didn't notice Diontae Johnson during move-ins. Did he report today?

MIKE TOMLIN: Oh, yeah.

Q. Is he going to rep like normal, like T.J. and Minkah?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm not proceeding with any anticipation of any of those type of things, man. He was here on time and did a heck of a job at the conditioning test like everyone else so we keep moving forward.

Q. Like you said about Najee, do you see that leadership role in Diontae?

MIKE TOMLIN: I do. I do, and not for the first time. I thought he exhibited growth in that area significantly a year ago.

Q. What is it about Najee at such a young age that you feel that he can be a leader?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's just him. It's in his personality. I imagine he's been that on every team he's ever been on in his lifetime. So it is a natural act for him. So it's just something that you recognize and you cultivate. It's not something that's mandatory in all individuals, it's a team. It's appropriate that you have enough of them, but it's not something that's mandatory per individuals.

Q. Najee says that he's not a vocal leader when he categorizes his leadership style. What kind of leader do you think he is?

MIKE TOMLIN: He's vocal. He's just selectively vocal.

Q. In your offense, what are the most important attributes for a slot receiver, and do you have that guy obviously on your roster?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think in today's game, slot receiver play requires different skill sets depending upon what it is that you're doing. You're stretching the field vertically, it might require a certain skill set; you're working underneath and against zones, that might require a certain skill set; you're playing against man-to-man, it might require another skill set. I think that's why increasingly so you see so many people in today's game playing inside.

Years ago there was a designated slot guy, and that was the only guy that played in there. At the early stages of my career here, very rarely did you see anyone play in there besides Hines Ward, for example.

In today's game, based on schematics and match-ups and so forth, you see people moving in and out of the slot position all the time. So I just think that's the nature of that discussion in today's game, not only with us but also the other 31 teams.

Q. Back to Ogunjobi for a second, you guys have a little bit of a history with him. Was any sort of consideration given to that before the move?

MIKE TOMLIN: Very little. None.

Q. Chase Claypool today said that he was naïve in the past with the way that he prepared for the season. Have you seen a more mature player coming into camp?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think he'll write that story. I think we just got here a couple hours ago. I can't give you an answer to that. We just had a conditioning test at 4:00. I think that will continually be revealed.

Q. How much are you looking forward to getting in the room during game week with Brian and Teryl and trying to get a game plan together? You've got three pretty established defensive coaches throwing some ideas around.

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, I'm always excited about the plan developmental process, whether it's defense, offense or special teams. I feel good about the staff that we've

assembled, but we'll have an opportunity to live up to those expectations.

Q. You always talk about advancement from year one to year two or year two to three. Two of your offensive linemen were pretty much thrown in there. How much do you think that will help them?

MIKE TOMLIN: I expect it to be significant, not only because of what I've seen from them, but also what experience in this environment has showed me. Years ago, man, we had young guys like Pouncey and DeCastro, they had some on-the-job training and I saw a significant jump in that group. This is a different group.

I think it's reasonable to expect those guys to be much better and to grow, but based on their talents and their experience.

Q. During mini camp we heard from a lot of linemen who felt like James Daniels was already stepping into a leadership role for the offensive line. What have you seen from him in your time with him so far?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know that we've been in enough challenging circumstance for that to reveal itself. I would imagine they were just trying to answer questions at that point of team development.

Q. Any O-line position changes coming out of the spring?

MIKE TOMLIN: We'll see. You know, in the spring we're just teaching and learning and getting to know and things of that nature. We hadn't made any changes or depth chart positioning based on what has transpired in the spring. We mean what we say in that regard. But now the competition and evaluations begin.

Q. Could you give us a Ben camp story when you think about Roethlisberger, one of your fondest memories?

MIKE TOMLIN: I enjoyed going by Ben's room. Ben is one of those guys, man, that brought the comforts of home to Latrobe. He spared no expense or amenity.

I walked in that room today and I laughed because Cam Heyward is in that room now but it's less comfortable, I'll say that. Cam is somewhat of a caveman.

Q. Ben recently made some comments about me-first attitudes kind of maybe being a reason for playoff failures of the team. What are your thoughts on that? Is that a growing problem that has to be fixed?

MIKE TOMLIN: I have no comment regarding that. I didn't read it or hear it, and I haven't talked to him regarding it. So those are his opinions. I have no color to add to that or expand upon that. It's just fruitless.

Q. You have three capable guys at cornerback that can start outside. How do you adjust those snaps? Does somebody maybe move inside?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's to be determined. I'm excited about that. But I'm excited about a lot of things. I like our inside linebacker rotation that has a lot of capable men, and I think that's why we're here.

With each passing day, with each passing rep, we're going to gain clarity about some of those type questions.

Q. There's always been a familiarity with the form of offense you guys ran with Ben Roethlisberger because he was here for so long. Not only is he gone, but now you have Matt Canada. What's the challenge like for these guys to not only figure out who they are but figure out what this entire offense is going to be?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know that we're any different as we sit here today in that regard. I think every year you come with those questions: What are we, how do we play to our strengths, how do we work to minimize our weaknesses, what are the schematic things we value and how do we display that in our plan and in our actions. Although there may be some variables that are different this year, I think we ask those questions annually, individually and collectively, as we step into an environment such as this.

Q. You talked about your appreciation for camp and this setting. Is that something you developed here previously in your career, and where did that come from?

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, I had that mindset in 1979, man, when I was putting my mouthpiece in the boiling water getting ready for youth football. I just love it. I always have. Since I was seven years old I've been a part of a football team, and this time of year means something. Those of us that have been in this thing in any capacity, in any role, we like that feeling. We understand what that feeling is.

When I lack that excitement, man, that's probably when it's time for me to move on to something else. I didn't boil a mouthpiece today, but I'm ready nonetheless.

DraftScripts by ASAP Sports