

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

Sunday, January 8, 2023
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Mike Tomlin

Postgame Press Conference

Pittsburgh - 28, Cleveland - 14

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm appreciative of the efforts today. I'm appreciative of the efforts all year. We're an evolving group, and that evolution continued even into today.

But I'm just appreciative of the collective. I'm appreciative of the men, not what they're capable of, but what they're willing to do. In the face of adversity that football presents, in the face of adversity that life presents, we have an opportunity to kind of display some things in all of that.

Hopefully we learn something. Hopefully we taught others something in the midst of our journey. So I'm just thankful for that group, appreciative of the efforts today in terms of getting the job done, divisional game.

So aside from all the other things outside of our stadium and so forth, it's important that we displayed the ability to focus and handle in stadium business, and they did that, even in some instances a young collective.

So appreciative of that. You grow from that. We'll wrap a bow around what is 2022 tomorrow. Today I'm just focused on this game and their efforts and things of that nature.

Don't have any information on Pat Freiermuth. He's being evaluated as we speak. Gunner, same thing, but hopefully those injuries aren't significant. Questions?

Q. When did you or the players find out about what happened in the Jets game?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know, to be honest with you. It's football in 2022. We were able to follow the score in other games throughout the game, just like we are in any other week.

Q. How do you think the team responded after the penalty against Heyward on the sack of Watson?



MIKE TOMLIN: We did what was appropriate.

Q. Winning is usually equated with experience, but even with a young group, doesn't it give you a sense of pride that they responded even with their inexperience, they still responded to you?

MIKE TOMLIN: I know what you mean by the question, but I think I've been pretty consistent all year. We lack experience in some areas, but we're good enough to win and good enough to win while we grow, good enough to win while which gain experience.

We did not grade this group on a curve. We did not grade Kenny Pickett on a curve. We don't function like that. Football is a game. Our business is winning, and our intentions are to handle business.

Q. You mentioned being a team on the rise going into the playoffs if you'd gotten in the playoffs. Do you think the team was on that arc had you qualified today?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think our record indicates that because that's all that matters. The style component of play is less significant. You step in the stadiums, you win games, you step out of stadiums.

So to answer your question, yes, we were a team on the rise.

Q. You talked about the evolution you guys have been on. What's the next step in that evolution?

MIKE TOMLIN: It comes to a screeching halt this off-season. I don't know if I pondered that. I was preparing for the potential of next week. I don't have the answer to that as I sit here.

Q. Looks like you guys will be facing Watson for a long time. How do you feel like you dealt with the challenges he brought to the table?

MIKE TOMLIN: We did that today, but obviously he is a problem, particularly as he runs around and extends plays and things of nature. That's probably not going to go



anywhere.

Q. And your thoughts on how your defense handled Chubb?

MIKE TOMLIN: Late in the season football, your featured runner has got to be the best featured runner in the stadium. It was not only about challenging our defensive front, but it was about challenging our offensive front to make sure that Naj had a good day.

So I think we checked both of those boxes.

Q. Mike, you said you didn't grade Pickett on a curve. Now that you've seen him for a year, his development I assume, you're pleased with where this offense could be headed?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know that I use pleased very often. I'll take it. We'll keep working.

Q. You said you don't grade any of these young guys on a curve, but what is the value of them playing a game like today, which at the start of it looked like it was for your playoff lives?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think this growth in big game opportunities, we've been in some big games, but we're doing business with these guys because of their ability to rise up in these moments. I think that's part of the things that attracted us to them individually.

When you look at each guy and you put a collection of those kind of guys together and you work them and you prepare them, you generally have an opportunity to grow in that way.

Q. How have you seen Connor Heyward progress?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think it's about opportunities for young guys. Due to a variety of circumstances, he got increased opportunities as the season wore on, and he proved that he belonged, and I'm sure that's going to be a nice springboard for him in terms of transitioning from year 1 to year 2.

You guys know the standard of expectation that we have for those guys. It's reasonable to expect rookies who are transitioning into year 2 to be significantly better. So we're going to start with that agenda with guys like him and others.

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