

# Pittsburgh Steelers

## Media Conference

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### Omar Khan

### Mike Tomlin

#### Draft Press Conference



OMAR KHAN: Appreciate everybody being here today. I'll talk a little bit about the rest of the off-season since we last got together in Arizona.

As you know, we were able to acquire Allen Robinson last week. Excited to have him. Early on when coach and I got together after the season, mapped out a plan on what we wanted 2023 to look like, one of the things we were keying on was acquiring a veteran receiver. Excited that we were able to get it all done with Allen.

Once the medical was confirmed to be okay, it was easy for us.

With respect to the medical, I'll just say that the doctors felt really good about him. We're going to be really smart, kind of like we were with Larry Ogunjobi, we were going to be conservative with the approach. We understand the importance of spring ball, but there's really no games being played until August. We did the same thing with Cole Holcomb, too. We're going to try to be really smart about that.

With respect to the draft, what can I say? It's exciting that it's almost here. The process has been great. We spent a lot of time getting to know a lot of players, not only on the field but off the field.

Once the season ended, started for me at the Hula Bowl, had an opportunity to interview several players there. Coach and I got to Mobile. We probably interviewed 40 to 50 players formally, another 20 to 30 players, probably more than that, informally.

Went to Indy. Had our 45 visits, formal visits. Handful of other informal visits there, when you run into guys there.

Hit the Pro Day circuit for a couple weeks, great. Really productive. Got a know a lot of players along the way there.

Then we got to obviously our 30 visits here, 30 formal visits. Had several other players that were local that didn't count towards the 30.

Last few days we've been doing a lot of Zoom calls, trying to be diligent, get to know as many of these guys as possible. Once I leave here, we got a couple more Zoom calls this afternoon.

With that, coach, I don't know if you wanted to add anything. Process has been great from my end.

MIKE TOMLIN: I think that's probably the most significant reflection I have on the process. It's not about Omar being new. We've done what we do in terms of our preparation. But I think the significant difference is that makes me feel good as we sit here today, we adjusted during COVID in terms of the gathering of information, the tools we were willing to use to gather information. Now that we're on the other side of COVID, it's almost like being able to couple those techniques with some traditional ones.

It's good to get back on the Pro Day circuit, see these guys in their college environments, the information you get from that. The interactions you get firsthand with them in a combine-like setting or Mobile. Good to get back to post COVID normalcy in terms of some of those things.

You couple that with the techniques we were able to develop during COVID in an effort to get information, whether it's doing research regarding medical information on those that you don't get an opportunity to get firsthand interaction with or utilization of Zooms to further get to know someone.

It just feels really good in this post COVID world to use some of those tools along with traditional ones in an effort to have a high floor of readiness. I just think that's why we feel really comfortable.

We didn't get lazy because of COVID. We're back out there. We hit a bunch of Pro Days. We took every opportunity that was at our disposal to beat the bushes and engage with these guys. I think that's why we feel comfortable about where we are.



Still some more work ahead of us, continual discussions that need to be had. That will be ongoing. But just the work that we've done, the position that we're in right now in terms of the information that we have.

Obviously we've been able to do some things in free agency that I feel really like provides a clean slate for us from a draft perspective. We don't have any glaring needs. We're able to look at the board in totality and not be swayed inappropriately in any specific way.

That's just kind of the framework of some of the things that we've done and why we feel prepared and good.

We'll stop talking and open it up to you guys.

**Q. Mike, you never had first pick to start a day. How advantageous is that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, we're excited about it. We've been talking about it. I think the thing that we're least familiar about it is the amount of calls that we will be or could be getting. That's what we've spent our time is talking about how do we organize and how do we get prepared for the receiving of the amount of interest that that pick could have.

That's a good and exciting possibility for us.

**Q. On the other hand, Omar, what about the calls for No. 17? Are you getting a lot of pre-draft action on that?**

OMAR KHAN: That's natural that that happens. That is happening. People are calling, are we interested in moving up, down. Sometimes it's just fishing for information, but it's happening.

**Q. How important is it to determine whether a guy is a football lover? How much do you determine that on a Zoom or a call, face-to-face meeting? Could that be a deal breaker if you determine he's not?**

OMAR KHAN: It's extremely important. It could be a deal breaker. I'm not going to go into how we come up with our final evaluation on that, but that is really important.

We ask certain questions. It's all part of getting to know the player, understanding if he loves it. A lot goes into it, but it can be a deal breaker, love of football.

**Q. Throughout history of this organization, new GM or coach, when the pairing is new, foundational pieces, haven't gone by need at all. Then they drift into need.**

**How is the approach? You're saying best athlete, but there are some needs like a third tackle...**

MIKE TOMLIN: We're not going to back ourselves into any corner as we sit here today.

That's what I mean when I said we felt really good about what we were able to do in free agency. It provides a platform for what you suggest, that we can just look at prospects available to us.

**Q. You started this talking about acquiring Robinson, the importance of him. You added Patrick Peterson. When you're looking to add a veteran guy like Robinson, how important is the mentorship piece holistically?**

OMAR KHAN: It's extremely important. Especially when you're getting to the draft, you're looking at guys saying, Hey, we don't necessarily need this guy to come in and plug-and-play right away. He can learn from a guy like Pat P or Allen Robinson. We have quality veterans, Cam Heyward. Lot of those guys. A great situation to be in.

**Q. DeMarvin Leal, what do you envision for him heading into 2023, his role? How might that impact the draft?**

MIKE TOMLIN: There's a lot of variables that determine that: his level of readiness, his growth and development physically, mentally, how he processes the experiences of year one.

I'm open and expect him to be on another level, like I do all guys. But I don't know that I see it with great clarity as I sit here today. Still too many moving pieces.

One of the major components of the talent acquisition that remains to be done throughout this off-season, be it the draft or free agency, things of that nature.

But make no mistake, he showed some things, particularly over the latter part of last year, it's reasonable to expect him to build upon that. So I'm open to it.

But no definitive structure to it as we sit here today.

**Q. Have you gathered enough depth at any position to where you no longer look at the draft, like offense?**

OMAR KHAN: I think any position we have to add competition, regardless of position, we're going to look at it. If it helps us it helps us.

Competition from the very beginning, I've said it, my job is



to bring competition to every position possible. If a draft allows that, somebody we targeted, we'll go after it.

**Q. In terms of what you've been able to glean so far in the pre-draft process about corners and tackles, have you been able to see a significant difference in top-end talent or depth?**

OMAR KHAN: Two good positions that are available in the draft. Overall this is really a good draft. I think when you look at the talent, just position by position, coach and I talked a lot about this, it's a good draft and it feels really good. We feel like we're going to be in position to draft some good players.

The phrase I always use, I don't really use drafting a need, but it's always at a priority need position. I think we're going to have the ability to address those needs.

**Q. Mike, from a coaching perspective, what do you prefer? Do you prefer the notion of using some of the collateral you have to move up to get a home run in the first top 10? If it is a deep draft, to have that many different components you can build into your roster, what is your preference?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You give me a specific player, opportunity, I'll probably have a more definitive answer. We're not opposed to moving up in an effort to pinpoint someone that might be special, but we do truly believe there's great depth in this draft. We're ready and comfortable for whatever.

I'll be really specific why we feel this is a deep draft. I think it's another by-product of COVID. There's some veteran guys in this draft. There's guys with six years of college football playing experience and five years of college football playing experience. I think that's one of the reasons why it is so deep. It's just another by-product of COVID.

**Q. A lot has been made about the 30 visits. How do you weigh who you bring in here to the facility versus going on the road and meeting them, Zoom calls?**

MIKE TOMLIN: A variety of things that determine that. Sometimes we're trying to gather medical information. Sometimes we're trying to find another intellectual football day with them. Maybe we didn't get any exposure to them because they were non-Combine or Senior Bowl, we didn't go to their universities.

There's several reasons why a guy could fall into the 30 visit list. Those are some examples of why. Medical, football get to know, a lack of exposure because they

weren't invited to something, things of that nature.

**Q. Omar, do you expect an early run on cornerbacks? Is that reflective of the quality there?**

OMAR KHAN: That's a good question.

You just never know. You just never know. I would assume so. It is a deep position. I think we're prepared if that happens.

**Q. Mike, how much closer are we getting to position-less football, especially on defense?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I go the other way. As opposed to calling it position-less, I think there's more specialization. Positions that we didn't necessarily identify as positions years ago have very specific roles.

I think the nickel, the interior corner is a position in today's game. The dime linebacker or the passing situations linebacker, for example, is a really specific position in today's game. There's interior rushers. Those guys oftentimes play on the edge on run-downs. It's a highly specialized game today.

In one vein I think you can call it position-less. I think you can go the other direction and say it's very specialized. I know what you mean. It's a discussion, certainly.

**Q. At wide receiver, a lot of the guys that you have in the slot, smaller guys, was part of getting Robinson, a bigger guy, about two-thirds of his snaps were outside, do you see him more of an inside guy?**

MIKE TOMLIN: He's had experience as an inside guy. He has physicality in his game. He can drop his weight for a big. He is an example of our general free agent interest. It goes all the way back to when he was at Penn State. Kevin Colbert and I spent a great deal of time with he and his family through his draft process. He was a Diaper Dandy. A 20-year-old when he came into the draft. We held him in high regard. We liked his football character, we liked his talents, we liked his upside. We followed him throughout his NFL journey. The interest still remains.

Those are generally the stories, that's the framing of the people that we generally do free agent business with.

Same thing could be said for E Roberts. I remember being down at Houston when we were at his Pro Day. Kevin and I stood in the parking lot and talked to he and his parents for maybe 45 minutes after his Pro Day was over. That's how we play free agency.

We build our team primarily through the draft because we do a great deal of research and work regarding these guys in draft prep. So our professional interest is usually a continuation of that.

**Q. Year two, is a media myth in terms of having a rookie salary quarterback, teams being able to go after other positions, stockpile a team according to the salary cap, or is there real substance to that?**

OMAR KHAN: You don't have to be a mathematician to figure it out. When you have a rookie quarterback that's starting for you, it gives you options. That's what I always say, you have options to do different things, maybe get creative on some other things.

**Q. You talked about the pandemic, some of these college players have been playing for five or six years. Throughout your interviewing process, whether it be the top 30s or Zooms, have you noticed more preparedness because they're older and experienced?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think you notice it. I think also you look at the general age of the guys. Whenever we put a guy's profile up, you have basic, measurable information, height, weight, speed, 40 times. The date of birth is a component of it. I would imagine the average date of birth for this draft class is significantly higher than maybe the previous years. There's a specific reason why: the global pandemic.

**Q. You obviously have known Omar for a while. What did you learn about him spending so much time during the pre-draft process on visits? What do you think you've learned that it will take to be successful collaborating in the draft room?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know that I've learned anything new. It's an opportunity for us to live out the things we already know we value about one another, about the team-building process, about what this organization needs from us.

We enjoyed our time traveling, just business to get done. But aside from that business, man, there's many nights sitting in a lobby having a cup of coffee, just continuing to hash over (indiscernible), the mode of operation.

You can't have enough of those discussions to further solidify why it is we do what it is that we do, how we go about it, and our roles in it, how we work together, the fluidity of it.

That's been fun. It's been fun. You can't shortcut it. I think that's why it's been fun. We respect it. We hadn't tried to cut corners.

The secret is there's no secret, man. We had to pack a bag and spend some time together and beat the bushes. It was a good process.

**Q. Process-wise, have you done anything different in terms of preparing for draft scenarios, how you evaluate prospects, than when Kevin was in your seat? How much has Andy played a role, too, in all that?**

OMAR KHAN: I would say overall, I've said this before, it's been a similar process. I would say it's 85% similar to how we've done it in the past. I learned it from Kevin. Have a lot of respect for how we've always done that.

Having said that, brought in Dan Colbert, Andy, Mark Sadowski, Sheldon White. They've had some cool ideas, things they've done elsewhere that they've given suggestions to us. We've implemented some. Some I've said yes, some I've said no. But overall it's similar.

**Q. You don't do the mocks any more, correct?**

OMAR KHAN: Strategy meetings where we discuss what we're doing if X, Y and Z happens, yeah.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

OMAR KHAN: I think that's part of the strategy.

MIKE TOMLIN: That was awesome (laughter).

OMAR KHAN: We have strategy meetings where we go through different scenarios, how we would take players and all that, yeah. Along with what you just said, yeah.

MIKE TOMLIN: I think a cool thing is we haven't been running away from the differences of transition. We've been open to it. Just like I was talking a year ago, we were transitioning at quarterback, the uneasiness, the feeling that could be positive fuel for us. We're going through a transition here in a significant role. We'd be remiss if we didn't have urgency about it and also just be open to the differences that could help us improve.

I've been excited about working with some of the new guys, some of the guys that aren't new but are in a new role. Just been open to doing things differently.

I think particularly guys like us that have been in roles or been in this organization for an extended period of time, it's a natural inclination to get resistant to new thoughts, ideas, approaches. That's something that you can fall into. That's been something that we've been consciously resisting because we might miss an opportunity for

improvement or get better. That's something that comes with transition, too.

**Q. How much fun is it for you the last couple years with all the transition? Does it give you more juice to have this new challenge?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm always having fun. I love what we do. But the variables have been some of the reasons why. I can't tell you that there's a time that I can point to where I'm not having fun, whether it's in the 12-month calendar or over the totality of my time spent here. I just love the challenges that this business presents.

**Q. You said corner was an area where there was depth. What other positions do you feel have depth in this draft?**

OMAR KHAN: I mentioned overall it's really good. You get excited about the D-line group, the O-line group is good. The corner group is good. Outside backer group is good. There's some good quarterbacks. We're not taking a quarterback.

MIKE TOMLIN: The tight ends.

OMAR KHAN: Tight end group is good. The receiver group is good. We just feel really good about the talent really at every position.

**Q. Omar, can you confirm it was coffee that you shared?**

OMAR KHAN: It was coffee (smiling).

**Q. What was it like for you this first time going through this? Did you learn anything traveling and everything that maybe you didn't know?**

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, you try to learn something every day. New experiences, talking to new people. It's a lot easier to get ahold of Nick Saban to meet one on one when you're in this role as opposed to my other role. You learn something every day.

Coach used the word 'fun' earlier. That's the right word. It's been a lot of work. We think we've been very diligent. The process has been tremendous. At the end of the day it's just been fun.

**Q. You mentioned at the outset you did whatever you could in the free agency process to gird yourselves. With Kenny going into year two, do you feel similarly about the offense overall? If the best players tend to come on the defensive side of the ball, you're**

**comfortable addressing that side of the ball? Do you have enough there on offense to have the playbook flourish?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Certainly, certainly.

**Q. If there's a player with a character concern, red flag, how do you go about evaluating that? Do you take a player off your board entirely, move them down...**

MIKE TOMLIN: When there's character questions, we simply do the work. Doing the work is boots on the ground, relationships in their town, getting information about their day-to-day from people in those environments. It's about interviewing them, talking to them about their past, what they learned, the steps they've taken in an effort to improve. It's professional research, private investigation.

We utilize all the tools at our disposal to gain enough information to make an appropriate decision on subjects such as that. At the end of the day we make a Steeler decision and we go with it.

What the tipping point is in terms of taking someone off the board or leaving someone on the board, those are not black-and-white discussions. Those are handled on an individual basis, based on the information that we have gathered and the amount of that information.

**Q. One guy in this draft you don't have to do much research on is Joey Porter Jr. Is it fun to evaluate someone like that that you know so well?**

MIKE TOMLIN: There's guys in every draft, particularly for me in recent years, that I have similar background with. Maybe the Pittsburgh guys. Maybe they're in a similar age group as my sons. The Sky Moore discussion a year ago. D Ham. The guys that played next door. All the 4-1-2s.

Because I've been a part of this community so long, I've essentially watched those generation of guys grow up. Seeing them play little league football, high school football. I've probably met them at some point during their development because guys like me meet talented young athletes.

It's not as unique as you would like to make it. I'm sure you are going to make it, but man, there's a handful of those guys for a variety of reasons, particularly in recent years as I mentioned, that kind of make that a less relevant and less significant story from my perspective.

**Q. Has your son been a resource this year?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't get any, any information from my son, particularly professional information (laughter).

**Q. You've been in contact with all 31 teams about trade-ups or downs?**

OMAR KHAN: I'll say this. Before Thursday, we will have been in contact with all 31 teams. I wouldn't say we're there just yet.

MIKE TOMLIN: You mentioned 32. Being in that position, we're acknowledging we're not quarterback shopping. That position might be one that attracts quarterback shoppers. So it's exciting to see what might transpire with some of those phone calls, the value that we might be able to get.

It is a unique position for us to be in. We are very excited about it.

**Q. How spontaneous is draft night? Say the 17th pick comes up, you talked to every team prior to that, is there a last-minute team called?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think preparedness makes that less spontaneous. That 32nd position is new to us. That's something that is probably going to have more of our attention in terms of the spontaneity of it or the uniqueness of it.

It's just due diligence in terms of preparing for the myriad of things that could happen at 17, whether we stay there, move up, move back. That's everyday business for us or every year business for us.

**Q. Hypothetically, if you had something worked out, you're probably going to have it worked out a few picks before that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Could be or could happen in the moment. That's just experience that tells us to be ready for all of those scenarios that you outlined.

**Q. Even informally or if at all, do you communicate with Kevin? Has he been involved?**

OMAR KHAN: I talk to Kevin. Kevin is always available to me whenever I need to call him.

MIKE TOMLIN: Kevin is a granddad, man. He's talking about granddad things, man. We're seeking wise counsel. He's laughing and wishing us good luck (laughter).

**Q. You said you looked at some things, specific things from Andy. Overall, how much of a resource has he**

**been during this process?**

OMAR KHAN: He's been great. I've known Andy for over 20 years. We know a lot about each other. We know how we think. But he's been great. It's been smooth.

MIKE TOMLIN: The interesting thing about him from my perspective is, my relationship with him is a new one, but he's not new to this organization or new to the values of this organization. So that's been cool to get to know and see the foundational component of that in him.

**Q. Omar, how do you describe what this like is for you personally and the feelings that come along with it?**

OMAR KHAN: Personally I'd say it's obviously exciting. It's a dream come true for me to be in this position. Been dreaming about it for a long time.

But I feel ready. I wish the draft -- I wish I was leaving here to go make our picks. But exciting. I think we're ready.

MIKE TOMLIN: Andy and I have been laughing at him. He's been talking extremely fast (laughter).

**Q. Miller and Austin, how are they coming along health-wise?**

MIKE TOMLIN: No updates regarding the health of guys. I don't have a detailed one, so I'm not going to mislead you with false information. We've been focused on talent acquisition. The guys have been going through the conditioning component of it. Haven't had a significant update in that regard.

We get on the other side of the draft, start teeing this group up for on-field work, it probably gets to be more of a relevant discussion at that time.

**Q. With the Zooms you've added to this, do you have a ballpark of how many prospects you've physically had a conversation with?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We have turned some stones over, I tell you that. We probably need to do that.

I'm telling you, we've touched more guys in this process than we have than any process I've been a part of. It's not anything unusual that we're doing. It's just, again, utilizing the COVID-related tools coupled with the normal back-to-business approaches that we've had. It's just providing a broader net for us.

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