

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Omar Khan

Weekday Press Conference



OMAR KHAN: Great to see you guys here in Latrobe. I wanted to begin by first thanking the community here for having us back, for welcoming us back. I personally really love being here. I can tell you that we don't take for granted our time here. We're excited to be here, and thanks to everyone here.

Also want to acknowledge everyone at St. Vincent College and also from our staff Aidan Hennessey and Tom Goin and their staffs for putting everything together. Campus is great, it's truly first class, and we're ready to go.

With respect to football now, I said early on that competition at every position was important. I think we've accomplished that leading into camp. We've got some really cool fun battles that will take place. I'm not going to get into specifics as to which players and which battles, but I think we have that, and there's a lot of time between now and September 10th, but at some good things we're going to be watching carefully.

I also want to mention Alex Highsmith. I'm really fired up that we got that deal done. Alex is not only an ascending player, but I'm confident that him and his wife Alyssa, they're going to be very impactful in this community. Just great people. They're Steelers.

Excited to be here and glad to see everyone, and ready to open it up.

Q. Have they given you a contract to work on?

OMAR KHAN: Right now there's nothing going on. We're not going to close the door on anything, but right now I can tell you there's nothing.

Q. With regards to Alex's contract, how important was it to get that done before camp so you don't have this lingering thing going on throughout training camp?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, every one of these negotiations is a little different, and it just so happened we had discussions

with his representatives. They're good people, and it was just something that was able to come together early, and we're glad we got it done when we did, and glad it's done.

Q. What kind of hoops were there to navigate with Joey's contract given he was a second-round pick drafted at slot 32?

OMAR KHAN: It was really more the fact there was a quarterback behind him, I think, that maybe had something to do with it, but he got done in time for camp. It was no issues from our end.

Q. Do you remember a time when you really had in camp no major contract things to deal with?

OMAR KHAN: I haven't sat back and done the research on it, but it's nice to be in that position right now.

Q. From this point of constructing a roster, could anything better have happened this past year? At least from the outside it looks like everything fell into place for you as a front office.

OMAR KHAN: I appreciate the optimism there, but there's always things that you wish could have happened, but for the most part we feel really good where we're at.

I told the team last night how excited I was about the locker room we've assembled there and the group of men we have in that locker room. We're in a good spot right now. I really believe that.

Q. Kind of cliché, the leap from year one to year two that everybody talks about, but can you speak to Kenny and maybe George and what internally is expected from them from year one to year two?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, our expectation is just what you said; they've got to make that leap from year one to year two. They know what it takes. They've been in this for a year now.

I'm confident that both those guys are going to make that progression. Both those guys are hardworking guys, and it's important to them.

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I don't have a doubt that you're going to see the growth, the maturation process in both those guys.

Q. Following up on the regret question, Cam Sutton, do you regret not talking to him a year before? What happened?

OMAR KHAN: I don't know if I want to deal in hypotheticals like that, but he had an opportunity -- he was a free agent. His contract was up. He got a great opportunity to go to Detroit. He was very happy with that contract.

We obviously had discussions. We talked about bringing him back, and it just didn't work out, and that's free agency. There was not a -- I'd have to go back. I don't really recall us having specific discussions on that last year.

Q. Is there any more eagerness or anticipation on your part this year to see how your guys from free agency and the draft will perform on the football field as opposed to maybe last year?

OMAR KHAN: Any more eagerness? Yeah, I mean, I think I want to see everyone grow, but obviously it's human nature. These are some of the players that we brought in this year, and we want them to succeed quickly.

Q. As a team and maybe the bigger question as a league, are you listening to what the running backs have been saying lately about the state of their pay situation, and what can be done?

OMAR KHAN: I'm not going to get into specific discussions about a specific position group, but I'll just say, look, you don't have to be a mathematician to figure it out, but when quarterbacks' salaries start increasing at the rate that they're increasing, at some point it's going to have a residual effect somewhere on the roster.

Every franchise is going to handle things differently. It's up to every franchise to decide how to build their roster, but eventually that's going to have an effect when the quarterback salaries are growing at a rate higher than what the cap is. I get it; there's ways to get around whatever the cap number is, but it's just going to be a natural effect.

Q. In terms of when you watch the film, scouts and coaches break down tape this afternoon or throughout camp, what do you want at that see at the end of the day from the team that would make you feel like you're headed in the right direction?

OMAR KHAN: Well, as we watch the film every day of

practice in the evenings, you just want to see guys getting better. You want this to trend that way. If you see that, then you get confident that good things are here to come.

Q. Can you see that in day one.

OMAR KHAN: You know, day one we don't really have the pads on. It's part of the acclimation period. So it's hard to say one after day you'll see that, but it's more of a -- that's what the whole entire training camp is for. That's what preseason is for.

Q. Going back to the running backs for a second, when you guys drafted Najee Harris in the first round, it was something that some people talked about as controversial. Do you think the Steelers as an organization maybe just value the running game more than some other teams do?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, I don't necessarily agree that it's controversial. Najee was a good player. We had him rated up there. I don't think we're ever going to apologize for taking a good football player.

Q. Do you keep conversation open with him, talk to him about some of the things he's expressed concerns about so you can keep a good relationship with him the next couple years?

OMAR KHAN: I have not talked to Najee specifically about that. We talk all the time. I see him every day. Najee is a Steeler. He's a great Steeler. He's a great person, great teammate. He's great in our building. You guys have all gotten to know him.

We just have normal conversation like always. We're all family in this organization.

But have not talked to him specifically about that.

Q. You only have two experienced running backs, a little shallow. Is Connor Heyward the reason you didn't get a third?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, you know, I don't really agree with that. We have Anthony McFarland; he's been here for a couple years. We've got Huntley is here, and we've got some young guys and we have confidence in those guys. If we didn't have confidence in those guys, we would address it differently.

Q. When you look at the way you guys construct and pay your roster, across the league people are adding up offensive weapons, paying offense a lot of money. You guys are kind of doing the opposite; paying the



defensive players, valuing the run game. Why are you confident that that's the way to maybe zig while everybody else is zagging?

OMAR KHAN: We don't really look at it that way. There's a good player, and he deserves to get paid. It's my job to try to lock him up.

But we don't look at it as, hey, we're paying too much to the defense. It's just sort of how I guess it's -- I haven't studied it enough the way you guys have to really put it in those terms.

Q. From a roster construction standpoint, you guys got bigger, beefed up the interior line. The teams that you're trying to catch, they can score a lot of points. Seems like you guys are trying to build something maybe a little bit different than I guess what they're trying to do, in terms of how you win football games.

OMAR KHAN: We had a vision after last season. Coach, Art, myself, we got together and we put together a plan of what we wanted -- we had a vision of what we wanted the roster to look like this year and how we were going to win football games. I can say every week in this league brings a different challenge, and you have to win football games in -- every week it's a different way. Sometimes we're going to hopefully win scoring. You might win scoring 12 points. Sometimes you might need to score 40 points. I'm confident we can win either way.

Q. Characterize Broderick Jones. Is he competing for a job? Is he the No. 1 guy? What are your designs on a guy that you covet that much that you make a move to get him?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, he's got to earn it. I think Coach addressed that, or you guys can ask him, but he's got to earn it. I'm confident he's going to -- we drafted him in the first round for a reason.

Q. I don't know if we asked you about Allen Robinson or not. Was he a specific target, or were you looking for somebody in that position and he just was able to come free?

OMAR KHAN: You know, we wanted to address that position, and we looked at several options, and we inquired about Allen, and we were able to get a deal done. He's a guy that we asked about, and we had the opportunity to get something together and get it done. We were able to do it.

Q. When you said you think we can win scoring 40 points a game, it's been a struggle to be prolific offensively. Where does that confidence that if you get

into a shootout with somebody that you're got the horses that can match them, where does that come from?

OMAR KHAN: I just think with respect to Kenny, it's just part of the growth process. Like you guys asked going from year one to year two. I'm very confident that everyone is going to grow. It's year two with Kenny, and just seeing what we did in the spring, I'm a believer that these guys can handle it.

Q. What are your thoughts on the cap right now, where you are under it, and you'd always like to have that buffer going into the season.

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, always need to have a buffer. Like to keep our options open. If there's an opportunity ever to upgrade our team, we want to be able to do it if it makes sense for us.

Q. Where you have that buffer, \$10 million?

OMAR KHAN: It changes every year. As long as you have -- I can give you an arbitrary number, let's call it \$5 million. I just need to know there's places where I can create later on in the season if we have to.

Q. We talked to Joey earlier today and he talked about being a ballboy. What do you remember about Joey coming up? You've been here for a long time, but him coming up and being on that other side of things?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, we joked, I was talking to him yesterday morning on the phone and I asked him, do you remember, do you remember how to get here, and he laughed and he said, yeah. He hadn't done it in a few years.

But he said so many things look the same, I've got so many great memories that are coming back. I just remember Joey running around when he was little. I remember in the indoor facility I used to be like, will somebody please tell Joey Porter Jr to please get off the football field, little things like that. It's kind of fun to see him grow and mature and be here in the role that he's at.

Q. Were you part of the workout for Penn State when he was a ballboy?

OMAR KHAN: I was not. I was not at that one.

Q. You changed out middle linebackers. What kind of Holcomb and Roberts can have on this team?

OMAR KHAN: Both were team captains. I think that was a



big part of it. I think they're both good football players. Obviously health is number one. They've got to stay healthy. But I think if they are, they're going to be impactful with that defense.

Q. How do you feel about your depth in that inside linebacker room, and how do you feel from a coverage standpoint that room can be better than last year?

OMAR KHAN: We signed the guys that we did just because we felt we had to get better, and I think we're going to be better with those guys.

I'm confident in the group that we have there. I've said this before. If there's an opportunity to upgrade a position group, we're always going to look at it, and if it makes sense, it makes sense.

Q. Kind of surprising from the outside that you were able to keep both of your quarterbacks behind Kenny. How much of a benefit is that for Kenny to have the same room, and specifically Mitch, who was a team captain last year, that instead of going somewhere else he decided to come back and be part of this again?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, continuity is great, especially when you have a young quarterback. Mitch is just tremendous there. The three of those guys have a great relationship, and they have it with Coach Sully and Matt.

It made sense for us. We're very fortunate to have those guys back and very fortunate to have them for the camaraderie that's in place in that room.

Q. What about Patrick Peterson coming into this team this year, a third training camp for him. In this setting with the amount of experience he has, how beneficial is that for the team, the defense, and especially two rookie corners on this roster?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, I think the last part of your question is the key, with young corners having a vet like that that's done it, been successful. He's been one of the best at his position. I think it speaks for itself.

Q. The additions to the defensive line depth, Keanu Benton and a couple free agents, why was that such a focus, and obviously as Cam gets older, does being able to rotate him with some quality depth guys that you can play a lot become more important?

OMAR KHAN: Is Cam getting older, is he?

Q. Not compared to me.

OMAR KHAN: No, this is a big men's league. You've got to have them, and we have some good competition there. That's going to be a fun group to watch.

Q. Talking about new contracts, I'm assuming that's going to include Mike T that you're not going to renegotiate. What went into that decision? Because it does rotate; sometimes it's a year out, sometime it's why not do it this year?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, that's not my department, but I anticipate Coach and I are going to be here together for a long time. Him and I have a great relationship personally, professionally, and that's not my business. It's his. Not my department.

But I anticipate both of us will be here for a long time.

Q. Along those lines, I think the phrase he used yesterday when he was asked about it was "I acknowledge I have more years behind me than I do in front of me," but it doesn't seem like he's running out of energy or anything.

OMAR KHAN: No, no, definitely not running out of energy.

Q. What did you take from him in your first year working in this role and the years leading up to it that you're looking draw on for however long that might be?

OMAR KHAN: You know, this year was so awesome for me personally. Doing it with him was just -- he made it even that much more special.

He was a great resource for me. When I had questions -- as you guys know, Coach is all football. He's very knowledgeable about the game. He lives and dies football. He was just a great person for me to lean on when I needed to lean on, and he was a great partner. We work well together, and I hope we're doing it for a long time together.

Like you said, he's got a lot of energy, and he hasn't let up there.

Q. He said yesterday when he was asked about his contract that he hadn't thought about it. I think for a lot of people that's kind of hard to believe, but in your experience with him, how locked in on this team is he that he can kind of shut things like maybe even his own personal finances out of his mind?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, you've got to ask him about the finances. I'm not involved in that. But we're both locked in.

Everyone is locked in. I mean, I'm so excited about this team and the locker room and the people we have here. We're all centrally focused on one thing, and you guys know what that is.

Q. (Indiscernible).

OMAR KHAN: It's just a vibe, where we are, the locker room of men that we have and the staff. We just know what's at the end of the tunnel. We know the hard work that it's going to require to get there, and I just feel good about the people and their willingness to do it.

Q. Better this year than most in your optimism?

OMAR KHAN: I'd have to sit back and think about year to year. I haven't done that. But just right now I feel good. I think we're in a good place.

Q. How much will that excitement grow when you guys get out there for practice and see all the fans here?

OMAR KHAN: Oh, that's why we're here. The element of having the fans here, it's amazing. It's absolutely amazing. I went for a walk -- I've got to work off some of these meals that I had during break here, but I went for a walk today, and I was amazed. It was probably like 7:30 this morning, and there were already cars lined up to come into the parking lot, and I just couldn't believe it. It was just a chilling scene for me to see that.

It just means so much to these people. I owe it to them to do everything I can in my power to not only help bring a championship to this organization but to our fan base. They're so loyal to us, and they've been great with me, and I've been here, what, 23 years. Just that passion is second to none.

Q. I don't know if you want to label yourself a player's GM or whatnot, but in terms of your relationship with the guys and what you plan on doing with your GM title amongst the dorm rooms, after hours, just the camaraderie that I know Coach Tomlin talked about, can you share some of that insight of how you might react or what your plans are?

OMAR KHAN: I didn't hear what he said. I don't know what he said about that.

Q. Are you a player's GM?

OMAR KHAN: You know, that's a tough question there. I mean, I am who I am. I try to get along with everyone. I try to be up front with everyone. We'll see where that takes

me.

Q. Does your title disallow you to be more -- maybe play dominos or get in an Uno game or play video games? Does that separate you from where you are?

OMAR KHAN: I haven't been asked yet to participate in those games, so I'm not sure if someone challenges me at Uno I would turn that down, or checkers. I would probably say yes, I'll come in, but if they ask, I'm happy to play.

Q. Where you do see your backup center options, specifically your competition behind Mason, and how much does a guy like James Daniels, who has center experience but is now playing at guard, kind of factor into that?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, we have -- I talked about this at the draft, adding flexibility, guys that have position flexibility, and we have Kendrick Green, Isaac Seumalo has played it, so we have options there. With Ryan McCollum, excited to see him out here next week in pads, and we feel good about the options back there.

Position flexibility was important on the O-line for us, and I think we got that.

Q. This time of year probably every team is optimistic and feels good about itself for the most part. Why is the vibe feel so different?

OMAR KHAN: For?

Q. For you personally.

OMAR KHAN: For me? I guess how, just based on how the off-season went, this was my first real off-season in this position, so I didn't really have anything to compare it to.

But just based how things went and our process and the people that I did it with, we talk and evaluate ourselves and the team all the time, and just feel really good about where we're at.

Q. You gave Diontae the contract last year, part of that. What are your expectations for him and what kind of season do you expect from him this year?

OMAR KHAN: I have no doubt in my mind that Diontae is going to be successful this year. He's a hardworking football player. He's exciting to watch. You guys saw it, that play he made in the opener against Cincinnati last year, the one-handed catch, that was a pretty special play. He's capable of that and more.

Q. Roberts really had to earn it at left tackle throughout this training camp. What are your expectations for him and what do you expect to see out of him during the next few weeks?

OMAR KHAN: Just growth. I think every day you want to watch him. Every day you want to see him get better. I don't have any doubt that he'll get better every day.

Q. You talked about positional flexibility on the offensive line. How about defensively? Seems like there's a lot of versatility. When you were assembling the roster, how important was that?

OMAR KHAN: Do you have a specific position or just as a whole do you mean?

Q. Seems like guys like Patrick Peterson, he's going to play multiple positions. Especially in the secondary all those guys can move around.

OMAR KHAN: Yeah with those guys in the secondary it's important, especially with that veteran that we signed. But yeah, it was important everywhere.

Q. Do you see more of a blurring of the lines between a safety and an inside linebacker, sub packages, things like that?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, you always have to take that into consideration, understand who's going to play. We understand the packages our coaches are going to implement, so we have to make sure we have the players that we think can fit those roles.

Q. On Elandon Roberts, did Brian Flores give you any input?

OMAR KHAN: You know, I don't think Flo was here, but we always talk and stuff like that, and he had talked about the players in Miami and New England and this and that and I'm sure somewhere along the line his name came up. I know they had a good relationship, and he played well for him.

Q. Do you view Joey Porter in that same light as Broderick where he could earn a starting job even with Pat and Levi being established veterans?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, I'd say that's what camp is for. We're competing, and we put the best 11 guys out on the field on defense, the best 11 guys out on the field on offense and go from there.

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