

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Coach Mike Tomlin

Weekday Press Conference



MIKE TOMLIN: Good afternoon. We're excited about this step of development, carrying this group into a stadium and competing. Don't have a lot of details for you as I stand here right now. We're very much focused on this afternoon's practice. We'll turn our attention specifically toward Tampa and the things that we intend to do after practice today.

I'll say this: All that are healthy are scheduled to play at this juncture. How much they'll play is to be determined.

Things I'm interested in: Very much interested in fundamental things individually and collectively, alignment and assignment things. I need a group and individual that play fast, at full speed, with fluidity. Like to know what they're doing. I want to see individuals in the collective that's situationally aware, line to gain and so forth, things relative to the game.

I'm really interested in them making routine plays routinely per their position. Oftentimes people think professional ball is about the spectacular, but really it's really about being able to deliver with an appropriate level of consistency routine things.

I'm going to stress that.

From a unit perspective I want to see them play complementary football and display awareness. I want to see a punt team in the red zone punting, keep units on a long field. I want to see defenses complement field positioning. I want to see offenses take advantage of field positioning.

The complementary component of it is something that's really important because you don't get that in a practice setting. It's iron on iron, when on Friday night we'll play together, and I want to feel groups that display awareness in that regard and complement one another.

Largely, man, I'm just excited about seeing this group communicate. I think communication indicates

understanding. You're not going to play good football without communication. I'll be looking for that.

I'm excited about the environment for the offensive unit. It's good to play on the road and get some of the things, the exposures that come with playing on the road, play clock, and things of that nature.

Just really excited about taking a step and the tape it's going to produce and the teach opportunities, and then it's reasonable to expect when we come back in here next week, we've got a better focus on areas that we are capable of doing well in, things we need to improve on in, and let that be our guide as we shape to next week. I'll pause and open it up for questions.

Q. Now that you've had a couple years with a three-game preseason schedule, have you figured out a way that works as far as getting ready?

MIKE TOMLIN: I really haven't because each team is different. I'm comfortable with the number of games, but I'm always trying to figure out what's appropriate in terms of work for this group individually and collectively.

We've got some young guys developing. While at the same time they have experience, it's good to go through the process of game readiness, finding that rhythm and going out and executing, so I'm excited about participation.

Q. Any idea how you'll handle fair catch on kickoffs, and is that the significant adjustment --

MIKE TOMLIN: We probably are more interested in seeing people play, returners return, blockers block, than we are addressing the intellectual component of the rule change.

We get three games, kickers are putting the ball through the end zone, I think that our mentality is going to be anytime we get an opportunity to return a kick, we will, because we just want to see the capabilities of the 11 on the grass in the kickoff return unit.

Q. Do you talk to the opposing head coach about that, say hey, can we get some kickoffs here?



MIKE TOMLIN: I'm not into that personally, no.

Q. We've seen Kendrick Green do the fullback H-back in practice, and you guys have seen it dating back to last year, but how much more do you learn about him in that position in a preseason game?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's significant, not only him but anyone. What you see out here is one thing. What you see in the stadium is another.

That's why we're excited about carrying the group into the stadium, because when the environment changes, sometimes the play does, as well.

So we're interested in seeing who can take a level of play from out here and carry it into a stadium and then some.

Q. You had Najee and TV get banged up a little bit last year in the preseason. Does that change your approach this year with practices or your approach to the preseason games?

MIKE TOMLIN: No. Obviously we want to keep everybody upright, but injuries are a component of the game. We can't live in our fears. We've got to get individuals and collectives ready to play.

We'll make the appropriate judgments on individuals.

Q. KC has put the pads on. Are the rest of the injuries at the safety position still day-to-day, and how do you feel that that depth behind has developed?

MIKE TOMLIN: I could describe them as day-to-day at the safety position at this juncture. Some of the guys we're just getting to know, to be quite honest with you. Trenton just got here short number of days ago. Some of that is on-the-job training or getting to know while competing.

Thankfully some of those guys have been in NFL environments before, so it makes you a little bit more comfortable, allowing them to play, although you might not have a very good knowledge of the capabilities of what they might be able to do.

Q. Because you have a lot of new people on defense and you're hunting for new things on offense, is that part of the desire to make you the starters, the front line guys to play? Is that what you're hunting for?

MIKE TOMLIN: I just think philosophically, I lean toward playing just in general. I know there are different approaches to the preseason, and I respect the approaches and opinions of others, but that's kind of

always been in my comfort zone if we're going to box we have to spar. If we need to get ready for the regular season, then preseason is an avenue in which to do it for individuals and collectives.

Q. Minkah is healthy enough that he could play --

MIKE TOMLIN: Yes, right now everyone that's healthy is scheduled to play.

Q. Kendrick is still doing stuff with the interior linemen, but have you seen a change in his demeanor and enthusiasm for this? It's unorthodox; he said he hadn't touched a ball since high school.

MIKE TOMLIN: I really haven't. He's a young guy that's professional and wired in and is urgent in everything that he does. I'd be making it up if I told you I've seen some shift based on the things that we're asking him to do positionally. He's always wired in.

Q. Are you encouraged by what you've seen when he's in that role, though? He was pretty prominent in the goal line yesterday in terms of just being out there.

MIKE TOMLIN: It's been solid. We'll keep looking at him and others. Again, specialization -- we get in an environment likes this, we'd better be open to secondary jobs and roles and getting to know the individuals and finding out what it is that they can do.

It's a bunch of those little stories going on around. I know some get more traction than others.

But it's just very much part of team development. I'm looking for a backup snapper, for instance, I'm not sure not highly interested in that. But there's a lot of these roles, secondary roles and things that transpire in an environment like this.

Q. Kendrick was insistent that night that the coaches had told him that this would probably not continue, but it did. Is it continuing because he was so good at it?

MIKE TOMLIN: We're just -- there's an installation schedule at this time of year. Some of the things that you see in the practice setting and the volume of it is based on points of emphasis and installation schedules.

The last couple of days, we've been focused on short yardage and goal line as we round out our readiness to go into a stadium for situational play.

That's probably why that's getting more attention or a lot of attention right now. If we were working 3rd and long you

guys probably wouldn't be asking me about him.

Q. With Kenny being so young, does he need more reps or more work in the preseason than a veteran quarterback would?

MIKE TOMLIN: Yes. (Laughing).

Q. You don't know how much more yet or still to be determined?

MIKE TOMLIN: We'll play it by ear. We'll give him what he needs. It's always my mentality. I'm open to all that healthy playing. How much they play will be determined by what it is they need for it to be a productive step in the process for him or week, and then we'll deal with next week next week.

Q. With Anthony McFarland, it seems like there could be opportunities to highlight his skill set this season. How do you feel like over his first couple years in the league he's developed or prepared himself for this kind of opportunity?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, I think he was a redshirt sophomore when we drafted him, so we realized that some development had to take place there. To his credit, he's continually gotten better over his stay with us, and his role has kind of grown continually, as well.

What's transpiring right now is just probably a continuation of what's transpired, and I'm excited for him and seeing if he can carve out an increased role for himself.

Q. Do you have a rough idea of what Pickett would need for a first preseason game? Is that a couple completions, a couple first downs, successful series?

MIKE TOMLIN: Really hadn't thought a lot about it to be honest with you. Again, as I mentioned, in an environment like this, man, it's probably prudent for us to be small picture. We had a good padded practice, Steelers versus Steelers.

Tomorrow's practice is geared toward Tampa, so tonight we turn our attention on some of those detail things and just how this press conference falls probably not really good for airing some of those detail planning questions relative to the game as I stand here right now. 12 hours from now I'll probably have those answers.

Q. It looked like Kevin Dotson had a significant wrap on his shoulder after practice. What's the severity of that injury?

MIKE TOMLIN: None. He'll be out there today.

Q. Kenny praised Gunner and the work he's done this year in preparing. It's obviously not his second year in the league but second year with you guys. What have you noticed in his development?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, I don't know about development, but Gunner is a guy that's always urgent. He's a tough guy. He's a football player first and receiver second. You put him in competitive circumstances, he does football player-like things.

That's why he's an attractive option maybe to Kenny and his teammates. The guy loves football, and he can't hide it.

Q. You also liked Benton in the draft process, Fehoko and Armon Watts in the free agent process. Now that these guys are here and you've been coaching them, have they provided for you what you were looking for in them to this point and how you feel that defensive line competition is coming?

MIKE TOMLIN: Feel really good about NFL-capable guys at that position. The competition is going to be stiff, and particularly how things play out in stadium, it's going to be a major component of it. Largely been pleased with the progress of that collective that you mentioned. Those with NFL experience I think at times have displayed that, and I've appreciated the pedigree of Benton. So we're working.

Q. When you guys acquired Patrick Peterson, I imagine his mentorship and leadership was part of it. Now that he's in a camp setting, what's stuck out to you about the work he's been doing with the young defensive backs?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, that's just what you do. That's not my focus as a guy that evaluates him. I'm concerned about the quality of his play and his preparation and his approach to business.

I'm getting familiar with those things, and that's been pleasing.

I appreciate his willingness to teach others and communicate in helping their developmental process, but it's not something that is on the front of my agenda or has captured my attention overly. It's just kind of what's expected. It's a cultural thing that we value. Experience teach inexperience. Guys that have been here teach those that are new. It's the right thing to do when you're trying to move the collective in a certain direction.

Q. Andy was in here before we spoke with you and we



were asking him about the versatility that the roster has. Is it a hope and goal of yours to create a roster that could be more match-up oriented than what you had previously?

MIKE TOMLIN: I just think that there's an attention in the match-up component of the game today that you cannot deny. Things trend and things move in the game, and the match-up component, the situational match-up component is big and getting bigger by the minute.

You'd better position yourself to play that game with depth and depth with various skill sets.

So that's something that we focus on.

Q. What's the difference in evaluating that on a practice field out here versus doing that and evaluating it in a stadium environment?

MIKE TOMLIN: What are you asking, evaluating what?

Q. When you're evaluating that depth at the position versatility and maybe positionless football as some might say, how do you evaluate that on a practice field versus evaluating it in a stadium?

MIKE TOMLIN: I really don't kind of understand what you're asking there. Really I evaluate guys the same regardless of setting in terms of what I expect from them, assignment detail, display of situational awareness, playing fast and fluid.

The things that are critical from an evaluation perspective are the same in stadium as it is out here.

Q. Kenny Robinson has had an opportunity to step up with some of the injuries in the safety room. What have you seen from Kenny and his approach to taking those reps?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's a guy that, first of all, has positioned himself to take the reps. I talk to these guys about reporting into environment like this highly conditioned because it positions you to take advantage of opportunity when it presents itself.

It's obvious that he's in good shape because the lines have gotten short at that position. He's been able to absorb additional snaps, and because he is in great shape, he's made good use of those snaps.

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