

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Mike Tomlin

Weekday Press Conference



COACH TOMLIN: Good afternoon. We're excited about leaning in on our second preseason opportunity. Couple reasons why: First, it's a home game weekend. We're always excited about familiarizing ourselves with Acrisure and some of the good things and some of the challenges that come along with it.

One of the challenges is defensive communication. Our home game venue is an asset to us in that regard, but it does present some challenges from a defensive communication perspective, and so that's one of our little agendas, if you will, in preparation for this game, making sure that we respect that component.

We get one opportunity in the preseason to play at home, and so defensive communication in the midst of that is going to be big for us.

Also, just familiarizing ourselves with the itinerary on a home game schedule, hotel, things of that nature, dealing with traffic. There's a lot of new Steelers. So we don't take any of those things for granted.

We need that exposure. It will be interesting to watch the group push through it and how they remain focused on what's really important, ultimately, their play in the midst of all of that.

It's a reasonable opportunity to expect us to be better in all areas. Because of last week's exposure, not only last week's exposure but last week's film study, and then adjustments in terms of what we focused on this weekend in practice, some things that we need to do better, individually and collectively, we'll highlight our agenda.

In an effort to allow these guys to show what they're capable of and their ability to get better in designated areas and improve.

Just like last week, as I sit here today, we expect to play all healthy players. Three guys that are probably not going to play just based on their level of health as we sit here right

now is Larry Ogunjobi, and Tre Norwood, although he's been practicing in a partial capacity. Probably wait until next week on him and Nate Herbig has missed a few days. Probably not appropriate to put him in uniform.

I am excited about seeing some guys play this year for the first time, guys that we held out last week, guys like Cam and T.J. and Meka and Pat P. and Joey Porter Jr. and Keanu Neal and KZ are some guys who didn't play last week who were scheduled to play, and looking forward to watching those guys, particularly the guys that are new to the NFL like Joey or new to us like Keanu and Pat.

Really excited about seeing the specialists work. Last week, we played the younger new specialists. This week we're playing the guys who have Steeler experience, looking forward to watching those guys execute, specifically in the return game, really interested in Anthony McFarland as a kick returner and Calvin Austin as a punt returner. We focused their efforts last week on offensive contributions, particularly in the first half of the game. We really are going to be interested in the special teams contributions of those two in particular this week, along with, obviously, their offensive responsibility.

But looking for those guys to show their capabilities in that space if given an opportunity. Those are just some of the reasons why we're excited. Obviously, we're doing a little bit more game planning. Last week we had one day of prep in preparation for play. This week we'll have two days. So it's reasonable to expect the guys to display more understanding relative to this week's challenge to play with more fluidity. For us to do a few more things schematically because of that additional day.

So all of those things I'm excited about seeing from the group.

Q. When you got here, you said you better be open to being pleasantly surprised in this environment. Were you?

COACH TOMLIN: I was surprised on a lot of levels positively. But I'm open to it, and I think this that's what this process needs to be about and this environment. Sure we have a hard-core plan. Sure, there's some things we



want to see but we better be open to adjustments to give the group what it is it needs and we better be open to being pleasantly surprised or to see the unexpected.

We've got 90 guys here we're trying to take to 53, and so we can't have too many preconceived notions in an effort to make sure that this process is a fair one.

Q. Somewhat along those lines when you got here you talked about that feeling in the air, the vibe, how has it manifested itself, a lot of guys have talked about that repeatedly?

COACH TOMLIN: I just think the individuals bring it. We've been talking a lot about not making things mystical. We're responsible for the creation of a great day, individually. If we're positive contributors to it.

So we're trying to take the mystique out of some of those things. We're not hoping we're going to have a great day or hoping there's going to be a positive vibe; we're owning our roles in the creation of it, just like we own our roles in the creation of victory. We're not rabbits foot-type people when it comes to creating victory.

That's been some of the things that's been on the front of our radar as we've developed as a team in this process.

Q. Omar and Andy have discussed the depth they've been able to add to this roster. How have you seen that play out here in camp?

COACH TOMLIN: I'm not looking at it from a depth perspective right now. I'm just really interested in giving the 90 guys here an opportunity to show what they're capable of and in the midst of that it will be revealed to us.

We respect all 90. We're looking forward to them stating a case for themselves. Obviously we feel good about the 90 we have that is highly competitive and that creates the depth in which you mentioned.

Q. Focusing on the details is a big theme for you and this team. How have you seen these guys kind of do that every day and zone in on getting those details right?

COACH TOMLIN: I think it's just a continual process. We cannot tire. We'll be continually trying to put that eight pounds in the five-pound bag, we like to say. It is details. When it's good on good and everybody knows what they're doing, it's varsity on varsity.

What's the determining factor for success? Ultimately, man, it's technique relative to the positions that you play

and it's the detailed understanding of assignments that allows you to play fast and fluid, light on your feet, communicate, and all of those things.

Q. How much longer will you play Kenny in a first team offense role?

COACH TOMLIN: We'll play it by ear. I acknowledge that those guys are going to play. I'll also acknowledge they'll play more. But what that is as I stand here right now I'd be lying if I gave you a direct answer.

Q. What would you like to see from Kenny in this outing?

COACH TOMLIN: Just like I mentioned at the outset, just like I talked about the entirety of the group is reasonable to expect them to be better in all areas given last week's experience, in-stadium experience.

The process by which we go through to tee up performance is something that we want to capture and master. And so this is a second time for us to do it. So it's reasonable to expect that performance floor to be higher.

Q. You obviously don't have any control over who you get to face in the preseason, but are you excited about the challenge of your defense getting to face Josh Allen?

COACH TOMLIN: Like you mentioned, we don't have control, so whoever shows up and plays, we'll face them.

Q. That approach you talked about a little bit ago, does that explain why there haven't been any fights or skirmishes, anything we've seen?

COACH TOMLIN: We appreciate tough guys, but this is not an MMA team that we're putting together. And so fights don't help us win football games. So we've been talking very black and white in that manner, and I appreciate the guys' willingness to make that posture or that position real by adhering to it.

Q. What have you seen from Kenny in his first camp as a starting quarterback?

COACH TOMLIN: Man, I just like the way he's communicating with people. I like the way he comes every day ready to compete. He's not overanalyzing the big picture too much. He's just trying to play his role in the creation of a great day and being there. I think that other people, by virtue of his position, getting their vibe off of that and his ability to remain singularly focused and hypercompetitive, I think, is an asset to our unit and to our

team.

Q. We've seen Cam and T.J. have just this kind of goofy relationship in some ways. How do they push each other, maybe bring out the best in each other on and off the field?

COACH TOMLIN: You know, I watch it. Obviously I'm not in their relationship. But I appreciate it and I watch it. And I just think that both guys are teed up comfortably for their roles in their relationship.

Cam is a big brother in his real life, and T.J. is a little brother in his real life, and I just think they're comfortable in the ways they come together on that premise. Obviously there's mutual respect and T.J. is a grown man, an elite professional, but their dynamics I just think is it's very comfortable for them because of who they are in their personal lives from a brother perspective.

Q. Is there any potential long-term concern with Ogunjobi or Herbig?

COACH TOMLIN: No.

Q. In this game, even in next week's game, is this a chance for those fighting for the third string quarterback to show what they can do to earn a spot?

COACH TOMLIN: Everybody is fighting for everything. I always smile when you try to identify battles. They're all battles. We're not assuming anything. I respect every man here and what they're pursuing. That's just one of the many opportunities that's being sorted out through this process.

Q. Felt some raindrops and things of that nature out here, could you talk about what your field crew means to this environment?

COACH TOMLIN: Hoop and Company have done an awesome job, first presenting some quality fields for us, but also working hard to maintenance them and keep them upright as we tear them down. I can't say enough about the service that they've provided.

There have been some challenges, particularly early on, we had some rain days and so forth. We had to put together a tarp crew. Man, we just respect all the roles, departmentally, that make this thing go, and that field group is significant.

Q. What have you seen and/or liked about Nick Herbig? Has he been everything that you've thought when you picked him?

COACH TOMLIN: He has. Obviously we like doing business with Wisconsin, just schematically, the things that they were doing defensively under their former coordinator, Jim Leonhard, were things that were very similar to what we do. So there's less speculation there in terms of your vision of what he might be capable of doing. It's the same thing that made us comfortable when we drafted T.J. and Loudermilk and Benton. There's very little speculation schematically. There's a lot of carry-over.

I can't tell you that I'm overly shocked at what we're seeing from him. It's very much in line with what we saw on Wisconsin video.

Q. What did you see from the tape with Broderick Jones from the game on Friday and how much is he pushing Dan?

COACH TOMLIN: I thought he did a really nice job for a first-time out. I thought he played with energy and played with finish. And oftentimes when a guy is in his first opportunity and is worried about assignment, some of those things are lost.

It's really good to see him play with physicality and finish, and it's reasonable to expect him to take a significant jump this week and into the next, and what happens over the course of the next two weeks will probably determine that component of that discussion that you just mentioned.

Q. No coincidence he's played more than any offensive player?

COACH TOMLIN: I'm surprised by that. I'm surprised by that. (Laughs)

Q. The way you've been able to use your inside linebacker, is that giving you flexibility, some mixing and matching?

COACH TOMLIN: It's just really a component of today's game. We've got some varsity inside linebackers of varying skill sets, and so we're just excited about dividing the labor up on a week in, week out basis and highlight that skill set and position ourselves to play really good defense.

Got respect for the contributions of all of those guys that have been working in that group, and AC has been doing an awesome job of coaching them.

Q. Harris had a Lisfranc injury here last year. Have you done anything differently about the way you approach his workload or what you're doing for him?

COACH TOMLIN: Not in response to the injury you

mentioned. It's just the maturation as a professional, giving him what he needs. We don't live in fear regarding injury or injury history.

Q. What did you feel he needed during camp this year as compared to his first couple of years at camp?

COACH TOMLIN: Less physical reps required the older he gets and that's nothing groundbreaking or earth shattering about that.

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