

# Pittsburgh Steelers

## Media Conference

Monday, October 30, 2023  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach Mike Tomlin

### Weekday Press Conference



MIKE TOMLIN: Good afternoon. Quick week, so I'll start quick first with an assessment of our play last night. Obviously not the outcome that we wanted. I know a lot has been written and said or asked about the officiating and so forth.

Here's my mindset and our mindset regarding officiating. It is our desire to win definitively, where potentially controversial calls are less significant. That's what good teams do. That's what elite teams do. It's our desire to be a good and elite team so that we're not as flimsy and become a component of some debatable calls and things of that nature.

I acknowledge there was some of that in the game, but it's some of that in most games, to be quite honest with you, things that are capable of being reviewed or assessed in that way.

I like to focus my energies on the things that within our control, the quality of our execution, and I think when you do that definitively, it makes those discussions less relevant.

I think that's the point that I want to make to our football team moving forward. You just simply got to make those things, those discussions less significant by the quality of your play, by winning and winning definitively.

Obviously we didn't play well enough for that to transpire.

I thought we had some opportunities early to gain better traction, but we didn't seize those. Very first play of the game we had Diontae running down the middle, for example. The next possession, I think we had George on a corner route, kind of behind the defender. We weren't able to connect on. We got in the red zone, Diontae slipped in the end zone. That was a four-point kind of a play. That's kind of where we are.

We're going to continue to work and work to improve and make those plays with much more consistency and

position our guys to be in more of those circumstances so that we can get the type of starts that we need for the games to unfold in a more fluid manner, more to our vision, if you will, as opposed to trying to close the distance in the second half.

We've had some significant play in terms of quelling our move, if you will, and then we also had a turnover in the second half that kind of slowed things and kind of put us in the position that we were in trying to close the distance from multiple scores back, and then we were able to lay back in some soft zones and make that tough sledding for us.

We were able to get some turnovers, but they weren't the type of turnovers that tee up the offense in terms of being on a short field, although I do appreciate them, they kept the score down, they weren't the type of ones that teed up the offense.

Obviously we've got a desire to dominate the turnover component of play. We got some but not the type that's really advantageous. Flash plays in the special teams could be an asset to us. We didn't get that. Obviously we'd like more consistent punting than we got yesterday, as well.

We've got some things to address, and we will, but equally as important, we'd better turn our attention from a preparation standpoint on the Tennessee Titans.

I'll talk injuries briefly. Minkah could be characterized as out. He's got a hamstring injury. I don't have additional information in terms of time of that injury, but it's safe to say that he's not going to be able to be available to us on a short week.

I think the door is definitely ajar for Kenny, probably a game-time type decision based on the information that I'm holding here today with no structural damage and so forth to his ribs. So we'll see how -- we'll go through the week. His ability to throw, his level of comfort, his effectiveness, et cetera, and let that be our guide in terms of determining his availability.

We've got some other bumps and bruises that are being

evaluated, just kind of a component of a quick turnaround. We'll see where some of those things lead us. We're not practicing today, but we're forecasting some practice availability. Guys like Kazee are hypothetically listed as limited. Some other guys who had some bumps and bruises along the way, but not anticipating any of those being limited in terms of availability in the game.

We've got some guys that are working their way back in the 21-day window. Cam will be a consideration this week. Anthony McFarland will be a consideration this week.

We've got some things to juggle from a personnel standpoint in terms of inclusion of who's going to be a component of the plan and available to us and beyond that how much they're going to be available to us is another component of the discussion, as well.

But we'll get clarity in those areas as we push through the week and get close to the game time.

Now focusing on Tennessee, first, I was just really impressed with their young quarterback and the way he performed yesterday, the way he managed the offense, the way they managed him within the offense. He took care of the ball. He was thoughtfully aggressive. He delivered the ball downfield to one-on-one playmakers, guys like D-Hop, who are always open. D-Hop is always open. His catch radius, his strong hands, his ability to high point the ball makes that a true statement. Obviously we've got to be conscious of one-on-one circumstances with him.

But Will has got some other eligibles that are a challenge, as well.

Okonkwo, their young tight end, getting familiar with his skill set. He appears to be really fluid and athletic in a match-up issue.

Still very much Tennessee Titan football. They play off of the exploits of Derrick Henry. Man, we've got to do a really good job of working to minimize him, but that's just a component of it. Their play action passing game, their misdirection passing game, all of those things feed off of his talents.

You'd better do a really good job of bottling him up at the line of scrimmage. You can't let him get to the second and third level clean. If he does, he is a real problem. His long speed is an issue. His size and strength obviously is an issue. His free hand is an issue...is something special.

They screened him the ball, as well. They just do a really good job of playing off of his exploits and including others while doing so.

On the other side of the ball, they get after you up front, with that group led by Simmons. Got a lot of respect for him. Man, he is one of those guys that's capable of taking over a game via the run, via the pass. You can just tell that he is the heartbeat of not only that unit but probably that football team. The spirit and the intensity in which he brings to competition is really respectable.

But he's not alone. They have Landry and Autry and others, Arden Key. They've got a good four-man rush, and they do a really good job obviously of bringing additional people from a pressure standpoint. They bring the nickelback position quite a bit and challenging you from a protection standpoint.

There's been some turnover obviously in the secondary particularly in recent weeks with the trade and so forth, but they do a really good job of keeping a lid on it, particularly of late. You've seen some adjustments schematically from them in an effort to minimize some explosion plays. That number is way down.

We're anticipating a rough-and-tumble game. Steelers-Titans, business as usual. Our senses are heightened because it's Thursday night ball. We've got to do a really good job of putting together a plan that's appropriate, and when I say appropriate, I mean we'd better do things that we can handle.

In some instances, we're capable of being an experienced group. In those instances, short weeks are less significant. In other instances where we lack experience, we'd better be thoughtful about what we ask these guys to do and their level of readiness and in-helmet perspective on the preparation. But that's no different for any team, any of the teams that are preparing for Thursday night play. You've got to make those type of decisions in an effort to be diverse enough to keep people off balance while at the same time managing your guys and putting them in position to play fast and fluid and communicate and be successful.

This is our first opportunity at it. We're excited about it. We've got a couple of short weeks this year, and you know how we are, we don't run from challenges, we run to them. It's an opportunity for us to distinguish ourselves and to really embrace the challenge that is preparation this week.

There will never be enough time. We've got to be artful and thoughtful about how we construct the week in an effort to maximize the prep time. The guys got to do a really good job of preparing formally and informally up until the 11th hour, and then we'll go play.

I'll pause and open it up for questions.

**Q. I know it's a short week, but will you try to have Kenny practice tomorrow or will you have to wait until game time almost?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We're going to work on Wednesday. Wednesday is going to be a really functional practice, and so he'll have an opportunity to display readiness at that time.

**Q. Regardless of Levi Wallace's health, has Joey done enough to be a starter going forward now?**

MIKE TOMLIN: He has.

**Q. How do you position your guys to be in more of those circumstances, talking about the big play opportunities a moment ago?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, we've just got to keep crafting. We've got to do a really good job in this.

The longer you get into a season, the more evident your opponent's personality is, the more evident our personality is. But that information is valuable in terms of the early portions of games in particular in terms of positioning guys to make splash plays.

**Q. If Kenny can't go Thursday, will it be Mitch again?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Yes.

**Q. When you say Wednesdays, is that your normal procedure for a week, or are you doing something a little bit different this week.**

MIKE TOMLIN: It is our normal procedure for a short week.

**Q. Diontae was very firm and outspoken about the officiating after the game yesterday. Do you have a discussion with him or have you had a discussion with him since then?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I haven't seen the comments, and so I reserve any comment until I see what he said.

**Q. A short week like this, how do you determine what you don't need to go over during the week, what hits the cutting room floor for lack of better words?**

MIKE TOMLIN: A lot of it has to do with your units and the experience of your units, individually and collectively.

In some instances you have to physically go through things. In other instances there are boxes to check.

But you'd better push the weighty downs to the front of the line, the downs that define games, the downs that comprise highlight shows, possession downs, red zone football, two-minute, things of that nature.

You can't shortcut any of that.

So some of the 1st and 2nd down football oftentimes in weeks such as this, you make some decisions in that regard.

**Q. What's the impact of losing Minkah from a communication standpoint? Who takes over on the back end?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Obviously the loss of Minkah is a significant one. It's a multi-man job, not a one-man job thankfully. We have some veterans back there, guys like Killebrew and Kazee and Keanu Neal who are veteran NFL players, and that lessens the impact hopefully, but obviously it's not a one-man job when you're talking about replacing Minkah, whether you're talking about his play making ability or his hub of communication ability.

**Q. We've seen a little bit of Patrick Peterson play safety. Is that something you think is an option maybe inside or outside of Minkah's availability for him and at this point in his career?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Pat has been very versatile. He displays really, really good football intellect. That's one of the things that attracted us to him.

As I mentioned last week when we lost Cam Sutton in free agency, that made him an attractive option because of his flexibility, positional flexibility and his football intellect that will allow him to move around and do some of the things that Cam was able to do when he was here.

**Q. Because you've used Minkah in so many different ways, does that lessen now that you have other guys piecing together that role?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, when Minkah is doing things and moving around, the guys that he's working with are also moving around and doing other things. I'm not worried about their ability to execute assignment from that perspective. The fluidity of that has been a process. I think where the collective has grown.

**Q. You said after the game that you didn't order the scheme of the game plan. You played three safeties**

**just like it seemed like you always would. Now you have a week to prepare; do you anticipate kind of ordering things a little bit?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We've got some planning to do. Those things will be discussed. But I'm open to doing anything that positions us to be successful.

**Q. Miles hasn't played much defense for you since he's been here, but he's a guy you can trust to play?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Miles has started as a safety in this league. I'm not concerned about his abilities if that's what you're asking.

**Q. Following LA you talked about taking Watt, putting him on the other side occasionally, dropping him a little bit more occasionally. I think at the end of the third quarter you looped him inside and helped blow up a run play. How is that process coming of finding other ways to have him attack from other positions so as to diversify the coverage --**

MIKE TOMLIN: It's week to week. It's week to week.

**Q. I believe Rodney Williams got more snaps than Darnell yesterday. Was that game plan specific or what is Rodney doing that is getting him included more?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Just how the game was unfolding. Probably we were down multiple scores, particularly late. Rodney played a lot there, when we were in the one-dimensional phase, if you will. Sometimes snap counts don't always reflect intentions from a planning standpoint.

It's probably more a reflection of how the game unfolded.

**Q. Do you need to get the ball to Pickens more?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Yes.

**Q. Any idea why it unfolded the way it did yesterday?**

MIKE TOMLIN: They did a really good job of doing some different things and rolling coverage his way. But not overly concerned about that component of it. We've had dynamic receivers here before who get a lot of attention.

When you're right and well, it creates opportunities for others in the running game and passing game and then opens up their opportunities. Our issues yesterday was we didn't take advantage of the opportunities provided in other areas because of the attention that George was getting.

That's probably our focus as opposed to George. When George occupies two guys, that's a great opportunity for others in the running game and passing game, and it just wasn't enough dominance from us in those other areas. It's probably my knee-jerk response to the subject matter.

**Q. You guys were really successful running the ball the second half the last year. Why do you feel it hasn't carried over to this season?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We're not there yet. We're not at the turn. We're continually working to get better, and we'd better.

**Q. When you see a call that you say you haven't seen in 17 years of head coaching, rush progressed in the short time he's been here?**

MIKE TOMLIN: He's done a really nice job. We put him in a helmet yesterday. He did enough to be considered in that way. Liked the overall trajectory of his play. It will be a big week for him continually as he shows the detail and the communication things that make you comfortable in terms of putting him on the field.

**Q. When it comes to Levi specifically, is he a guy that could come back this week?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We'll see. We'll see.

**Q. Your thoughts on how Mitch did and how he's done in his role here?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Largely, man, Mitch has done a really good job, and I'm talking about day-to-day, the things that come with being a backup quarterback in terms of being an asset to Kenny, being an idea guy, being a really good communicator, making sure quarterbacks and receivers are on the same page, et cetera, et cetera. He is highly professional and really good at those things.

Hasn't had a lot of opportunities to play, but when called upon, always is ready above the neck and competitive, and so just really comfortable with him.

But we'll see where the week leads us in terms of him having a week of prep or a couple of days of prep on a short week and what that might mean in terms of quality of play. All of those things are up in the air, especially considering Kenny's availability is up in the air.

We'll kind of walk through some of those things day by day.

**Q. Are you seeing more aggressiveness from Mitch from where he was as a starter last year to how he's**



**played in these two instances in relief?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, that's tough to compare. I don't necessarily remember some of the details or some of the things that transpired in the early portions of last year.

**Q. Mitch was one of the guys who mentioned execution being a common thread on the offensive side or lack of execution. Are you seeing these guys take enough responsibility when it comes to executing out there?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I am, but responsibility doesn't get it done. The play making does. We don't have a responsibility issue, we've got to make plays.

**Q. Was the neutral zone a point of emphasis over the summer because of quarterback sneak play and might there have been some confusion there with the official?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I am not going to speculate on that.

**Q. Do you need to see something from Kenny Tuesday and Wednesday or is it purely medical, if he feels good --**

MIKE TOMLIN: Certainly I'm going to want to see something, absolutely. He's a young guy. Position withstanding, he is a young guy, so I need to see some physical preparation in order to consider him certainly.

**Q. How do you think James Pierre did in the snaps he got?**

MIKE TOMLIN: James has stepped up for us in the past before, and he's always a game guy, detail guy, good communicator. I thought he did a serviceable job.

**Q. On Levis, I know you weren't in the market for a quarterback in the first 35 picks or anything, but when you study guys, look ahead for whenever, that popped the most about him? Was it arm talent or what was it?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I didn't look it in that way if you're asking from a draft eval perspective, I didn't. I've really just been focused on him this week from a prep standpoint.

**Q. Trade deadline tomorrow. Are you guys looking into anything there and how involved are you in that process?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We're always open for business.

DraftScripts by ASAP Sports

