

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Teryl Austin

Weekday Press Conference



Q. Mike was talking about Keanu the other day. Where have you seen the most growth in his game from training camp until now?

TERYL AUSTIN: I just think he has a better understanding of what we're trying to do and the techniques that they've been teaching him and all those things, and he's continuing to grow as a football player, and it's good to see. It's nice to see.

Q. Has he come on faster than what you thought he would?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, I don't ever put it whether they're coming fast or slow. I just see how they grow and how they do and we just continue to feed them as long as they're ready and they can take the things that we're asking them to do.

He's been on a steady upward trend. Anybody I think if you're watching the games and you watch it like we do as well, you can see that. So we'll just give him more. He's right where we were hoping he would be. We didn't put any limits on him. Put it like that.

Q. Montravius said that he's brought joy to that group, maybe just the way, the energy that he has, the youthfulness of it. I'm wondering if you notice anything like that.

TERYL AUSTIN: No, he's a great young guy. A really good mood. I don't know if he's ever seen a bad day. Those are always good energy guys. I think that's probably what Mons is talking about that this kid is a good energy bringer. So when he's in the room, he lightens the room up. He's good to be around. I think that's always a good thing because we spend a lot of time around each other.

Q. After so many injuries to different position groups, will that change in some of the things you have to do philosophically or will it just be different guys playing

the same roles and the same schematics?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, I think you always have to take into account injuries, but I think playing the team we play, we'd better have linebackers that are ready to play. I think that's really the big thing. We know they're going to run the ball and try to run the ball effectively, so we'd better make sure we have the right guys in the game, and I don't think that is a major schematic change or major anything like that. It's just we know Cleveland, and Cleveland knows us. We'd better bow up and get ready for a tough football game.

Q. Who are the right guys? Will it be kind of a mix and match?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think it will be. I think we have some guys, obviously you guys know Mark, who's been here, Mark Rob, and then we've got Michael who's got NFL experience. He's a 100-tackle type guy, and he's played in a lot of football games.

I think we'll kind of lean on those three and try to get the most out of those three and try to play to their skill sets.

Q. You guys have had -- Tomlin's record against rookie quarterbacks is better than anybody's since the merger. What works for you guys in those environments?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think in those things, it's just -- I mean, it's like most of these games. It comes down to the players and how they're playing and executing. I think we do a good job in terms of trying to make it rough for a rookie quarterback and not make it easy for him, not make it simple for him, and really try to put pressure on him.

I think that's really the biggest thing for a lot of rookie guys. If you can get them out of their comfort zone, they just -- it's through no fault of their own, they just haven't seen enough snaps at this level to sometimes adjust accordingly. Like any young quarterback we're going to try to get him off his game as best we can and then let everything else work.

Q. To this point Landon Roberts hasn't been asked to be a three-down backer, but what tells you he can be that and is that in the cards for him going forward?

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TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I think he hasn't been because obviously we had Cole and then we had Kwon, but I think he's got the mental ability to do it. He can line up. He can get things lined up. He knows where to go, all those good things.

I think at this point you trust him the most in terms of being that guy to be in there. But we'll see how it plays out because we have some other guys. We've just got to find out a little bit more about him.

Q. Do you trust him to be the communicator?

TERYL AUSTIN: He is a great communicator, good green dot guy, really vocal, takes charge of the huddle, takes pride in taking charge of the huddle. I have no qualms about him being a green dot guy.

Q. You don't have a large body of work to evaluate someone; how do you prepare for a quarterback that you haven't seen much, especially a rookie?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, I think you have to lean back kind of on what this series has been about and how this series, the teams that win and lose the games in this series, and really a lot of it comes down to who's able to run the ball and who's able to stop the run, and I think that's where we start. We give ourselves a starting point there to make sure that we're able to handle the run game and then we just let the game unfold however it unfolds.

Q. Mike has been a guy that's played a lot of different spots over his career. How do you handle his versatility while he's still learning the defense and kind of using his first skill set to supplement what Mark and E Rob do?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, I think, again, not knowing Mike really well in terms of game situations, just watching him on the practice field, I think we'll try to put him in some situations we think are advantageous to him and take advantage of his skill set, and then we'll probably grow it from there if we need to.

Q. A big picture question: Understanding that individual awards are not the end all be all, but it's been almost 40 years since a defensive guy has won league MVP. Why do you think defensive guys aren't considered for the mainstream award or aren't getting as many votes as they used to?

TERYL AUSTIN: Because it's an offensive league, and they want it to be about offense. But I think the guys that coach these defensive guys and the value they bring, they

know what the capabilities are and how much they mean to the team, not just the offense and not just scoring points.

I think it's just, like I said, more because it's an offensive league, and it is what it is. Our guys take pride in playing hard and playing well and can't control that stuff.

Q. What does a defensive guy have to do to get attention for an award like that? Do they have to score 10 touchdowns?

TERYL AUSTIN: Maybe you could write a letter to Commissioner Goodell.

Q. They were able to run pretty successfully against you guys. Do you think you're in a better position now than you were in week two in terms of defending that?

TERYL AUSTIN: We're still a work in progress. We gave up a big chunk last week that probably didn't need to be a big chunk. Until we get those knocked completely out of our game, I'm going to say no, we're not where we need to be. But we're working that way. We're fighting to get there. The nice thing is we've won a lot of games while we're cleaning up a lot of mess, and that's really the truth of the matter.

Too many chunk plays, pass and run for us, and if we take those out of our game and that's what we've got to work to do if we take those out of our game, we'll be much better. Until we do, we're going to be in dog fights like we've been in every week.

Q. You mentioned Keanu Benton earlier. What is it about him (indiscernible)?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, I think the things that -- one, he's really sharp for a young guy. He's really strong. He's really flexible in the hips. You watch him explode on people and get rid of blocks, hands, he's got all the tools you need to be a really dominant defensive lineman, and that's what impresses me.

Then you tackle on the fact that he's sharp and he understands things, it helps his growth, and I think that's part of the reason probably why he's growing and accelerating in his development.

Q. We've already talked about those injured inside linebackers. You've also got a couple safeties nicked up. Do you imagine you'll have Minkah and Neal available to you?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, I think those are going to go down to game time as we get closer to the game and we'll see.

But I think we have some guys here, we elevated Trent last week, we had Eli had to play a little bit more. I think we'll lean on the guys that have been in the program and try to see if we can get those guys to step up if they have to step up and do the job.

Q. What about Trent sticks out to you? What gives you confidence in Trent and what he can do?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think we like Trent. We thought when we got Trent, it was in camp. He came in and was tough, good tackler, showed some ball awareness, ball skill. Those are the things you like.

But again, until you see him in a real game situation like last week he kind of got thrown in and all of a sudden we've got Trent in the game, we've got Eli in the game, we've got a bunch of guys in the game that maybe you're not used to seeing, so until we get more of a body of work, then we'll feel more comfortable with him. But we like his initial skill set and the things we saw.

Q. Obviously you'd like to have Minkah in the game, but on the sideline, he was the one that was kind of alerting you guys to maybe change up the coverage on that last play there. What was that conversation like and how valuable was that?

TERYL AUSTIN: It took you guys like 10 questions to get there. I was going, that's pretty good. You guys held on pretty well.

Well, here's what happens in the thing. You get in those situations, I got a couple new guys in the secondary. Some of the things that you work on, they may not have worked on. So my initial thought was, hey, let's get them something where we can get them a little bit close, it takes a little bit of thinking out of it and we don't have anybody that lines up in the wrong spots. They assured me that the guys they had in the room would be able to line up where they needed them, so that's why we ended up going with their suggestion. You know, it was a good call. It's like anything. I think if you have good players, you have good coaches, you have to listen to their counsel at times, and so I know what I thought, but they assured me that it would be run right, and it is, because if it wasn't run right, we would have had to get ready of everybody.

Q. Did you think now he has to get up here and answer our dumb questions since he did that?

TERYL AUSTIN: No.

Q. If he doesn't play, he's not calling any more defenses?

TERYL AUSTIN: I'm not going to say that. He's going to be in my ear because he's always in my ear, but that's okay.

Q. With so many new faces back there, does that make Pete's presence maybe even more valuable because there's pretty much nothing that he hasn't seen, and he's still obviously executing at a high level?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I think with Pat, the veteran presence that he brings, there's really a calmness about him in stressful situations, and I'm sure that probably went into some of the thinking and some of the things that happened last week. That's always good to have. When you have a guy that's been through a lot of situations, some of these things when it gets tight, when it gets a little bit stressful, he doesn't panic, and that calmness will really kind of -- the other guys can feed off of that and know, hey, listen, it's just playing ball, it's just doing the things that we've been practicing to do.

So I think having him around in that regard in those instances is really big.

Q. Herbig and Golden only played seven combined snaps. What kind of went into the thought process with the defensive line rotation, specifically at outside linebacker, and do you have to get Golden and Herbig more snaps to get T.J. and Highsmith a bit more of a breather in future weeks?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, the deal is this: If T.J. and Alex can go and want to go, they're on the field. That's just the end of the story. They're the best guys we've got.

Those other guys will take their turns when those opportunities present themselves. But other than that, if T.J. and Alex can go and they're playing at a high level, I'm not going to pull them off the field. They need to get off the field, it's on them.

Q. Is that the same with your defensive line, too? Seems like your D-line rotation has shortened a little bit?

TERYL AUSTIN: Sure, it has, but it's really the same thing. We know right now Cam can't play as many snaps as he would like to, so there will be some rotation in there. At the end of the day if our big guys, if our best guys can play and they're able to play, then we want them on the field.

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