

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

Saturday, December 23, 2023
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Mason Rudolph

Postgame Press Conference



Steelers 34, Bengals 11

Q. How rewarding was that performance/victory for you? I know for the team, but you personally.

MASON RUDOLPH: Yeah, very rewarding. Yeah, just grateful to be back on this team this year and to have an opportunity to play a game. That's all you can ever ask for.

Just thankful to God for giving me -- orchestrating it the way he did and blessing me and us with a great performance.

Just special night. Thankful to God.

Q. The second touchdown pass to George, I saw you looking off to the left in the crowd there. Walk me through that.

MASON RUDOLPH: Yeah, just looking at my parents out there. I know where they sit, so just seeing what I can see, if they were enjoying it as much as I was. Yeah, that's all that was.

Q. What was your reaction to the crowd chanting your name?

MASON RUDOLPH: I think I said it this week, you know, we're all human. I would believe lying if I said I didn't enjoy it or like it.

But it's a week-to-week league. I've been on the other end of it as I said, so I try not to -- you try to block it out and play the game. We still had the second half to play despite the lead. You can't let that enter your mind and relax for a second.

You know, hey, we've got a bunch of passionate fans and it was just what a joy to play in front of them tonight. Last home game, all my family in town, so it was amazing.

Q. When you hit a play like that on the second play,

the touchdown, what does that do for you personally? What does that do for the offense to get the splash like that right off the bat?

MASON RUDOLPH: Yeah, I think a fast start, no matter whether you're in high school, college, or pro, it makes a difference, especially at this venue, at home. Gets the crowd into it to get a guy like George going early. His run-after-catch ability is just second to none, so it was a pretty cool view as I tried to chase him down from behind.

Q. Did you head butt him in the huddle?

MASON RUDOLPH: Before the play?

Q. Any time. Did you head butt anybody?

MASON RUDOLPH: Yeah, there was multiple head butts all night.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

MASON RUDOLPH: I just hadn't played in two years so I said I'm going to head butt some people.

Q. Did it feel cathartic, not just for you personally because of the journey, but you got a lot of the talented guys that have been frustrated at various points because points have been hard to come by. Did it feel cathartic out there, a like there was a release almost amongst the group?

MASON RUDOLPH: I think -- I mean, I don't know about prior baggage carrying into this game. From the start I know we were rolling. We ran the ball well. Offensive line played great all night against a couple tough pass rushers in Hendrickson and Hubbard.

Just felt like we were balanced and just clicking.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

MASON RUDOLPH: Yeah, nothing I can share. Just a lot of jubilation, yeah.

Q. Did you have expectations and did you exceed

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

them?

MASON RUDOLPH: I think I thought I had a good week of practice, and I didn't sleep -- I don't think I slept at all like Monday night to the Tuesday practice just because it was like that -- I hadn't taken a full day of reps in a while, so you're a little nervous and tightly wound.

Got off to a good start. When you build the confidence through the week and the preparation and Coach Sullivan and the way he took a lot of input from me and sort of things that I like, a lot of same stuff as Kenny and Mitch, but a few tweaks here and there.

He was very open to my input, and I think you just feel confident when you have a good week of practice and you have no regrets, did I watch enough film. I wanted to have no regrets in that department, so that gives you the confidence.

Q. Did your input involve going deep, taking shots?

MASON RUDOLPH: I mean, we have had those plays in a lot of time all year. When you start with a lead they have to pack the box, and they were doing that to try to stop the run. So when you're not leading and in a back-and-forth game teams can play the Tampa 2 and keep a lid on George and Diontae.

When you're ahead and leading and run the ball well like we were, once again, credit to the offensive line. They did great. They have to get a stop. They got to pressure, heat you up, and then they're vulnerable.

Q. Pat all last game and they have been vulnerable against tight ends all year. Did you feel they were going to overreact to that?

MASON RUDOLPH: Absolutely. Pat has been great for us. Coach T calls him a zone killer. He's so savvy with his feel for zone coverage and when to hook up and break in and out.

Kenny killed him with that in Cincinnati, so we and I felt like, hey, they're going to be alert to that, no question. We wanted to have some answers other places.

Yeah, frustrating at times because you want to get Pat the ball. We got the ball to other people and moved the chains.

Q. ...certain effort into going through your progressions, play after play. What went into the effort after so much time not playing?

MASON RUDOLPH: Yeah, I think as much as it's -- as hard as it is to sit and watch for two and a half years, I think you can sort of just go on autopilot mode or try to improve and put yourself -- call the play in the huddle, the snap count, you know, try to go through, simulate what you would do if you were in there.

I think just when years go by your football IQ improves, and I credit that to our staff and Mike T. We have great meetings each week in the morning where he kind of gives a synopsis from a defensive perspective. I think I just felt good having the whole week of reps. Last time I played found out 12, 24 hours before, so nice to build the confidence through the week.

Q. When you mention being wound up earlier in the week, not being able to sleep, did you have those same emotions last night? Any nerves? Feel more like Christmas morning?

MASON RUDOLPH: No. I think just kind of the jitters, like training camp the last few years. Before the first day you get a little wound up. It's probably more excitement than nerves. I get to take all the throws today.

I slept pretty good after that.

Q. What was your reaction to George and the way he responded to everything that happened this past week?

MASON RUDOLPH: I mean, I think he tried to shut the noise out all week, and he worked hard, showed up on time, and proud of him. Equally proud of the way Najee ran the ball tonight and Diontae. I got to get him that better ball to ice the game on a slot fade.

Pat, Darnell had a couple catches, A-Rob. Got a good group and just happy for those guys.

Q. Feel like you earned another start?

MASON RUDOLPH: You're asking the wrong person. Listen, we play this game to play. I love to play. But that's out of my hands. I'll find out the marching orders as we go.

Q. You're a guy that knows opportunities don't come around a lot. Any thought in your mind that this might be one of the final ones you had?

MASON RUDOLPH: Absolutely. Yeah, I think you never know. You got confidence in yourself as a player, but you're kind of thinking, am I going to jump into the commercial real estate next year or be playing quarterback. Those thoughts come into your head.

Q. (Regarding players rally around you.)

MASON RUDOLPH: I think the fast start helped invigorate the offense. I've got good relationships with guys on both sides of the ball. Mess around a lot with 97 and 90 and Alex Highsmith, and so, you know, I enjoyed playing with them tonight and, like I said, earning my paycheck and not just feeling like a free loader.

Playing a game and scoring some points.

Q. Last two years, how much of an opportunity have you had to have game-like reps with George? Where did you feel like some of the that chemistry came from?

MASON RUDOLPH: I think back to the pre-season game against Seattle here where I got to throw him a touchdown and see it in person. I'd seen it in training camp leading up to that. He had made some incredible catches, mostly thrown by Kenny and Mitch.

Any time he's in there and I was in training camp I was going to throw it deep to the guy if he is pressed one on one, and he made a lot of plays.

Like I said, we got a lot of the great receivers. Tonight was his night. Diontae has had a lot of nights all year, so they're two great players.

Q. You said your parents were here. When is the last time they got to see you play in a game?

MASON RUDOLPH: My dad flew up sort of red eye when we played against the Lions in '21. It was just him, so I think probably 2020 against the Browns.

Q. What are the next couple days going to be like reflecting on what happened today?

MASON RUDOLPH: Just a lot of gratitude. Just so thankful to God for throwing me a bone and giving me an opportunity to play. I got my family here and celebrating Christmas, so it'll be a fun time.

Q. Cam Heyward gave you the game ball in the locker room. What did that moment mean to you and what did he say to you?

MASON RUDOLPH: It was great. Yeah, Cam is our leader of our team and he was very kind. Such a competitor. I don't know, he does everything right. Great dude. So it meant a lot. It was special.

Yeah, I'm not one for speeches so I just kept it quick, broke it down.

Q. Is this your best Christmas present?

MASON RUDOLPH: I know I don't know. I got a treehouse when I was 12. This is definitely up there.

Q. First game ball?

MASON RUDOLPH: I think so, yeah.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports