

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Art Rooney

Weekday Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Art will make an opening statement, a couple comments, then we'll open it up to questions.

Art.

ART ROONEY: All right. Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for joining us today.

Just a couple opening comments. We've had a season with ups and downs, some positives and negatives that we have to consider as we get ready for the off-season.

Our rookie class was certainly one of the positives that I think we can take away from the season and build on. Omar, Andy and his team are already working hard on making sure we're ready to bring in another good group from this year's draft. A lot of work to be done there.

In terms of the next step, we need to do everything we can to make sure we get quality play out of our quarterback position going forward. We still feel good about Kenny Pickett and his future. He knows he needs to work hard to take the next step. We've talked about that.

One of the things I think we like about Kenny in terms of his career was how hard he worked, and he took a step every year. We're looking for that to happen here.

Mason Rudolph came in and showed I think what we're capable of when we do get quality play at the quarterback position. Appreciate what Mason did. We're interested in bringing Mason back.

I think we have two high-performing running backs in Najee and Jaylen. They along with an improving offensive line can be the foundation of success going forward. Certainly some positives there that as the season wore on I think you saw what they can be.

As you all know, Mike is in the process of hiring a new offensive coordinator, so we'll have some changes on the staff on the offensive side. We're looking forward to have

someone come in and take a fresh approach, that can help our young players grow and perform, have the offense perform at a consistently high level.

On the defensive side, I don't like to make excuses, but we got hit with a rash of injuries that at times was difficult to overcome. All things considered, I thought our coaches did a good job of plugging in guys who needed a program to figure out who they were on Sunday sometimes. A little crazy on that side sometimes.

The bottom line is I think we have a solid core group of players on the defensive side that we can build on and win with.

All in all, I like the way our guys kept fighting to get a Playoff spot. I think there's a lot we can build on moving forward. We need to find ways to make sure we're better next season. That's what we're about at this point.

Happy to take your questions.

Q. You said you needed quality quarterback play. Is that inside the building? Do you have to go out and get somebody? Is Kenny still the guy? What are your feelings of the position right now?

ART ROONEY: We still feel good about Kenny, where he can go. Obviously he does need to take another step. That's an important component of the next coordinator, making sure he helps Kenny take the next step. Yeah, I mean, I think Kenny, we still feel comfortable with Kenny.

With that being said, can't discount what Mason did. Can't discount the fact that having competition will be good for everybody. I think Mike feels that way. We all feel that way.

I'd say there's still more to come to see who's in the room, the quarterback room, when we start camp this summer.

Q. When you mention the search for the next offensive coordinator, what qualities are you looking for in that hire? How much of a factor is in kind of the hiring process?

ART ROONEY: I mean, number one, to be clear, it's Mike's hire. Head coaches hire their coordinators. It would be a mistake for me to try to screw up the lines of authority, let's say, in terms of how things are supposed to work.

That being said, Mike and I talk every day. Omar, talk every day, sharing ideas. That's got to be Mike's hire. I think Mike identified we want somebody that has some experience, somebody who has a track record that we can look at and feel comfortable with. Those are the things that Mike is looking for.

Q. Mason was here for a long time before these past four games. What is your view on getting overlooked, recognizing he can do what he did in those four games?

ART ROONEY: Well, I think it's hard to say whether he would have had the same results if he started the whole season. I mean, this wasn't the first season he played for us. Overall I think Mason's results as a starting quarterback in this league have been positive for the most part. So we know that. We know that going forward. That's one of the reasons why we're (indiscernible).

Whether he should have played more prior to this, I'm not going to speculate on that.

Q. Do you feel your team is closer to contending than it was at this time a year ago? How close do you think you are to contending?

ART ROONEY: I think it's fair to say that I do feel that we're closer this year at this stage of the game than we were at this point last year. As I mentioned, I thought we had a really solid rookie class, a few guys that really stepped in as solid starters for the future. Need to do that again. Need to have another good draft class.

I think we have a core group of players, that we can compete with this group. As I said, I think the biggest thing we need is quality play at the quarterback position.

Q. Much has been made seven years now without a Playoff win. Is there an urgency to get that stat out?

ART ROONEY: Yeah, I think there's an urgency. I think everybody, myself, Mike, guys that have been on the team for a while, T.J., Cam, everybody, we've had enough of this. It's time to get some wins. It's time to take these next steps.

So, yeah, I think there's some urgency here, for sure.

Q. Given that Playoff drought, why is Mike still the

right guy to lead your organization? Would you look to give him an extension?

ART ROONEY: I think the players still respond to Mike. That's number one. He still has the key characteristics that we saw when we hired him. He can keep the attention of a group of 20-year-olds for a whole season, keep them in the fight the whole way. Still feel good about Mike. Obviously if I didn't, we'd make a change.

I think if Mike wasn't able to lead us to a championship, he wouldn't be here. That's why he's here.

Q. What is your timeline on the extension? Is that something you feel like needs to be done with more urgency because of that pending offensive coordinator hire?

ART ROONEY: No, it will be done when it gets done. Hard to speculate on how long it will take. At this point I don't see it getting done before the coordinator's hired. I think that's going to happen sooner rather than later.

Q. Historically, the extension came with Mike two years (indiscernible). This time you didn't do that. Any particular reason why you let that go?

ART ROONEY: No, no particular reason.

Q. We're seeing stadiums that are in the age range of Acrisure Stadium getting upgraded. Have you had any types of talks, even within your own company, about thinking about the future of the facility?

ART ROONEY: We are, yeah. We are going through a stadium assessment at this point, really looking at what it's going to take to be in this stadium for the next 10, 20 years, whatever it's going to be.

It's a process. Hired some consultants to help us look at it. We like the stadium, think it's a great facility. With the right kinds of improvements, can continue to be our home for a long time.

Q. Got yourself a dome handy anywhere?

ART ROONEY: Not going to be a dome soon. I don't see that happening here.

Q. Mike in his last press conference seemed to be humble and more determined. Have you noticed a change in him, his resolve, of late?

ART ROONEY: Not sure I'd say 'a change'. Certainly there's a resolve there and a determination there. I think I

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

said before, all of us that have been around for a little while are anxious to take this next step. Getting a little impatient. We need to see the kind of improvement we all want to see, including Mike, believes that as firmly as anybody else in the building.

Q. Back to the offensive coordinator search. What is the timeline on that? How tricky is that when teams still playing, teams that are looking to hire now? How do you navigate all that at this point?

ART ROONEY: I mean, it definitely gets tricky with all the various scenarios you mentioned.

Look, we've interviewed three great guys so far. Deciding where we go from here. Mike and Omar will be out for a few days, get a chance to talk to some people down there.

I feel good that it will get wrapped up sooner rather than later.

Q. The decision to part ways with Matt mid-season is something this organization doesn't typically do. How tough was that decision? What did you learn from that process that can help you moving forward?

ART ROONEY: Well, it's not something that you want to do or like to do. Mike made the decision that it was time to make a change. Those kinds of things are not what you hope for when you start a season.

I'm not sure what we learned from it other than saying we don't want to have to do that again. This is an important hire to get the right person in there to help this offense take the next steps.

Q. Do you think it hurt Kenny's development going from one coordinator January on, then going to a different avenue after that?

ART ROONEY: It's not something you want to do for that reason. Continuity is important. Start a season with one coordinator, there's a lot that kind of gets put in place, it is hard to make a change mid-season. That's why it's rarely done. That's why we rarely do it. Probably didn't help him, to change that.

Q. What do you like about Pickett's game? Where do you see the areas he needs to improve?

ART ROONEY: The things about Kenny that we always like is his toughness, his competitiveness, his desire to be a winner. He has all of those sorts of intangibles.

What I think we need him to be is really just continue to

develop as a quarterback, read the defense quickly, get the offense into the best play for a given situation when he comes out of the huddle.

He's learned. He's had some experience with that. He'll continue to work on it.

Q. Based on your experience in working with quarterbacks, seeing quarterbacks over the years, is it easier to develop some of those on-field traits versus having to develop the intangibles?

ART ROONEY: Yeah, I think on-the-field learning is something you can expect progress from more than intangibles. Intangibles, you either have them or you don't. His ability to be able to see the field, read defenses quickly, those are things you can develop with experience.

I think you look around the league, you see that with young quarterbacks. First couple years they're kind of finding their way. All of a sudden, third or fourth year in, they (indiscernible). That's what you need to see.

Q. You said you liked what you saw of your team overall in the last four games. Related to the quarterback position, what was that?

ART ROONEY: Well, as you know, we had a three-game losing streak that was tough to swallow for everybody. To come back and say, Hey, we're not out of this thing, we're still going to play, we still got a chance, turning in the kind of performances we did in the last three games. Even going into Buffalo, I felt good about the approach the guys had. They were going up there to try to win that game.

It was just the way the team came together, just the overall psyche of the team is what you hope for. They were in the fight.

Q. The offensive coordinator search, do you feel like you and Mike and Omar have an idea of what you want this offense to look like, you're trying to find somebody to execute that vision, or is it more talking to people to see what their ideas might be?

ART ROONEY: Well, look, I think we have an idea of what we want the Steeler offense to look like. Start with that. We have a certain roster mix that leads to that. Can't completely change a roster overnight, so you kind of have to have a coordinator that feels like they can work with this roster and be successful with it.

Somebody that believes in that, that comes in, can work with this roster, do what's kind of already built here in terms of the roster, some of the skill sets that we have, I think

that's what we're looking for.

Q. A number of guys that have had connections or ties to Sean McVay, Shanahan, that coaching tree, what is desirable about having people with that type of experience?

ART ROONEY: It's a successful system, no two ways about it. Those guys have had a lot of success. The approach to offensive football has been pretty impressive.

I'm not going to say we're only going to talk to people that come off of that tree, but certainly worth talking to those guys.

Q. What is the difficulty of walking the fine line of patience, guys you already interviewed, maybe getting hired, waiting to interview, Super Bowl...

ART ROONEY: I mean, as we talked about before, it is a complicated set of scenarios you deal with this time of year, people interviewing for various teams. I think we're doing our best to kind of identify guys that we're not wasting each other's time when we have an interview.

I think we'll get there. I think there are enough good candidates out there that we'll find one.

Q. You mentioned Omar. His second full off-season. How do you assess the job he's done and what has he brought to that position?

ART ROONEY: I think Omar and his team, they've done a good job of, number one, obviously I think we had a good draft last year, found some key players that hopefully can be in key spots for us for a long time to come.

I think one of the things I was impressed with this year was just the kind of ongoing roster management. Some of it was forced on us with injuries and things. Those guys had to manage their way through finding guys to plug in that could help us win. It was an ongoing challenge this year. I think he did a good job with it.

Q. You mentioned bringing in some outside consultants as far as looking at improvements at the stadium. How much of that is also factored in looking at the practice facility, locker rooms? How much player feedback are you involving in that decision?

ART ROONEY: I haven't met too many players that are architects yet. We're not opposed to player feedback...

Look, we do look at what are the benchmarks around the country, what do players need to be successful these days.

To be honest with you, we're not as deep into the let's say assessment of this facility as we are into the stadium. But that will come. I think we have six or seven years left on our lease here. We'll work with UPMC and try to start to see where we go here. There's still a ways to go I think to get into this facility in a big way.

Q. The players have given feedback that they feel like the family support given by the organization falls behind what some other teams have done, as far as the locker room and the stadium. Have they given you guys feedback on things they'd like to see as far as family support that the organization can do?

ART ROONEY: Yeah, we've talked to players about postgame family rooms, things like that. We get input from them on that stuff.

Q. You've mentioned an emphasis on the running game. Certainly over the last few games, is it where you want it to be? What's the next level for it? What else is needed?

ART ROONEY: I think it's certainly one of the things you could say I feel better about it now than I did a year ago or even two years ago. I really feel good about having a kind of a two-headed monster at running back, two different styles of running back, both very capable.

Really, like I said before, I think the right offensive line can provide a real foundation for success going forward.

Q. Will you continue to add to that offensive line?

ART ROONEY: Yeah, I think we need to be better on the offensive line. Those guys got better as the season went on. There's no denying that.

We'll assess where we are. If there's places we can make improvements, we will.

Q. Evaluating Mason, pretty small sample size, is that an overriding component of it, that it is a small sample size, or do you see him as a guy that can take off and be better than he was with more experience?

ART ROONEY: You said Mason?

Q. Yes.

ART ROONEY: I think number one, Mason did show what we're capable of on offense with the personnel we have here right now. That's encouraging in terms of Mason's ceiling, let's say. I don't know that we've seen his ceiling yet. We drafted him high for a reason. Felt like he had a

lot of ability. I think we saw that.

He's probably going to have some options. It's going to be a question of whether he wants to come back, whether we can make the deal to get him back.

That being said, still feel good about Kenny and his ability to evolve as well.

Q. (Question regarding contract with Cam.)

ART ROONEY: I don't know if it would be fair to Cam to say too much about it at this stage of the game. Obviously those are things we'll get into as we get deeper into the off-season.

I'll just say this. We want Cam on our team this year and maybe going forward. He's as solid of an individual in the locker room as you could ever want. That's valuable to us. Unfortunately had some injuries to overcome this year. Hopefully he gets healthy and comes back strong.

Q. Questions about discipline and in-house rules. How do you view the discipline on this roster? Are there things that need to evolve from that standpoint?

ART ROONEY: I think this is the time of year where coach talks to the players and does exit interviews, gets that kind of feedback. I'd rather that feedback comes from the coach than (indiscernible) you guys.

All in all, we won 10 games, made the Playoffs. There were some ups and downs. We have some players that can grow. Like a lot of teams, we have players that need to grow. That's all part of it.

But I think Mike certainly is capable of handling that side of the house for us.

Q. Mike said he was open to considering extending the coach's staff. What goes into that kind of decision? Do you try to see what other people are doing? How do you decide you may or may not need a couple more voices?

ART ROONEY: I think you look at what's going on around the league, who do we need to be competitive in this league. Whether that's numbers or individuals, I think that's a thing that's under discussion at this point.

Q. Is there any update on the bid to bring the draft to Pittsburgh? What would it mean to have that event?

ART ROONEY: Yeah, we're I would say deep in the process of preparing the bid to bringing the draft to

Pittsburgh. I think we're optimistic that we'll bring it here in the not-too-distant future.

Q. I know you expressed confidence in Mike, his ability to get the players to respond. You also mentioned the impatience, ending the Playoff drought. How does that kind of factor into the terms of the extension that Mike will sign in the off-season?

ART ROONEY: (Indiscernible) representatives, get to that opportunity. That's kind of a discussion we'll have inside.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everybody.

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