

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

Friday, March 15, 2024

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Russell Wilson

Weekday Press Conference



RUSSELL WILSON: First of all, super grateful to be here, obviously to be a Pittsburgh Steeler. It's a great tradition. To be able to compete and be able to go to work with these guys every single day is the gift of this game. Enjoying the process of it all.

The reason I wanted to come here is because I wanted to win championships with Coach Tomlin and the guys in the locker room. We got some amazing players, guys like Cam Heyward, a guy who has been man of the year, a guy who has impacted so many opponent. Got to talk to him for a little while during this process.

And then obviously Mr. TJ Watt himself. Really should be defensive player. I don't know how many times, maybe third, fourth time could have won it. Just tremendous athlete, player, competitor.

Guys like Minkah, you know, George Pickens, and just so many other great players along the way. Got to see some guys like Freiermuth and Seumalo in there. Great place to be.

Grateful for the opportunity to be able to get after it and do what we came here to do, and that's to win football games.

Q. Has your role been defined? What do you expect coming here?

RUSSELL WILSON: Yeah, I'm expecting us to win and do everything we can to enjoy this process and get better every single day.

The gift of this game is you get to go out there and try to be the best version of you every day. Fortunately this is my 13th year in the league. Most of the years have been exciting and fun. One or two years, eh, but you get back to it.

I think I'm really excited about just the opportunity to really be the best version of myself every day, bring that to the table. You know, I know what it looks like to win. Coach

obviously knows what it looks like to win. This team does. The city does more importantly, the city of Pittsburgh. So I'm excited about it.

Q. What did Bert mean when he said a lot of work went into this with coach and Omar?

RUSSELL WILSON: Yeah, listen, I think when you have the opportunity to be a free agent in this process and go through that process, and when Denver allowed me to speak to teams and go through that process -- this is the first time I've ever gone through that process.

It kind of feels like you're at the combine all over again in a way. Kind of going through the interview process with people and getting to meet people.

I think that there is a few things that just jumped off the board about the Pittsburgh Steelers. Number one, I got to play here. Played in Seattle in Century Link in 2015. Great game back and forth. It was just a battle all the way down to the wire.

I just remember the players that they had and just the competitors that we had at that time, and now it's just -- and then coming here in 2018 playing here, just the atmosphere, walking into the stadium, just the energy.

I remember the towels, renegade, the whole thing. I remember the game coming down to the fourth quarter. At the end of the day, why I love this game because it's the greatest team sport there is. What winning looks like, it's all 22 pieces, and then you add the special teams as well, so really 33 plus more. All the people in the background you don't get to see.

So to me, when I got to talk to Cam Heyward, talked for an hour on FaceTime, and just it was a cool experience of a guy that has been at the top of his game for so long and also a man who has made a difference in community, a guy who has made a difference not just in Pittsburgh but around the country in all the things he's done. He solidified himself as one of the best players in the game.

I think also after that, the next day, next morning I got to talk it Omar, got to talk to Coach Tomlin on Zoom. I don't



know, I think ever since COVID everyone is on Zoom for the first part of it. It was supposed to be a 15, 20 minute conversation, and next thing you know it's hour and a half later.

I think that winning is a habit. Coach knows what those habits are like. That's what really fires me up. Omar, obviously he's done an amazing job of bringing this team together, and obviously our goal was to acquire some other great players.

Got to see guys that we have coming in today. Obviously Mr. Queen himself and just the player he is. For me that was a key thing. As we are all the call, zoom call, fast forward and Minkah a calling, I have to get off the call with them and get to FaceTime Minkah.

Minkah goes, you like to compete? You like to get after it? You like to win? Of course I do. So we were just laughing about that. Just the banter back and forth, the love for the game.

And then I got to talk to TJ. Just his energy, his focus, detail, of wanting to be the best in the world every time he steps in between the white lines. We got to go against each other several times and I've got a lot of respect and regard.

Obviously University of Wisconsin guy, so I know a lot of about them and vice versa. For me that was the process and I got to come here and put my feet on the ground in the city and got to go around the city and see the energy of the Pittsburgh Steelers and the fans and just go by the stadium and just all of that was a big part for me.

I was fortunate to have several teams call and all that, but this is the place I wanted to be, be a Pittsburgh Steeler and to wear the black and gold. It's a true honor, tradition, history. There is six trophies in there and we got to go get a seventh.

Q. Did you come in here with the mindset that you're the starter?

RUSSELL WILSON: I come in with the mindset of being the best version of me every day. That's always the plan. What we're trying to do is for me, I want to help our football team win. I think that's the job of the quarterback role is to help the Pittsburgh Steelers win.

That's always been the goal every day. So the goal is to get more trophies and do everything we can to win.

Q. You had options. Was it important for you to find a place where you felt you could be the starter?

RUSSELL WILSON: I think every day you wake up you look forward to helping the team win. I think that's just my focus right now. I've been fortunate to be in this league for a long time and have had a lot of success and a lot of -- done some cool things.

But there is more to do, and that's is where my head is at.

Q. When you got to Denver, I know you reached out to Peyton Manning to get the lay the land. Have you talked with Ben Roethlisberger at all or Kenny Pickett who can give you some guidance?

RUSSELL WILSON: That's a great question. I think there are some amazing quarterbacks that have played here obviously, and Big Ben is one of the greatest to ever play this game. I a really good relationship with Ben. Haven't had the chance to talk to him yet because I've been looking at schools and meeting different teammates, but we plan an linking up soon.

I have so much respect for him. Had great games against each other and amazing battles, and just watching all the things he's done, if I can do anything similar to him in terms of winning, the things he's done here, we'll be just all right here and win some more games.

I got a lot of respect for him.

And Kenny, made the decision to come here. I texted Kenny and talked to him a little bit. Every day we go out there let's be the best version of ourselves and try to make this team better.

So that was cool. Just texted him right away. So for me, this thing about the quarterback thing, being a quarterback in the NFL, there are 32 teams, 32 quarterbacks that get to start. But there are all these guys that get to do all the work together and the journey. It's a quarterback club.

I think that the best part about it is I've been fortunate to be a part of it for 13 years and want to continue that as long as I possibly can.

Q. You look forward to the competition with Kenny?

RUSSELL WILSON: Yeah, I look forward to the competition, being the best version of myself first. I think you always try to be the best version of you and competing with yourself every day.

I know the standard, what it looks like. I know what that looks like internally, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically. So that's the number one thing. Second of all



is you always want to make the room better. Then with making the room better you make the team better.

What we're really competing for is adding one more in that trophy case over there. That's what we're trying to do together as a team.

Q. When you beat Kansas City, I think if I remember right, you had 114 yards passing for three touchdowns. Can you continue to get that kind of bang for the buck, so to speak?

RUSSELL WILSON: You know, I think the best part about it is when the defense gets turnovers like in that game, makes a short field and then you go attack the end zone. We lit it up that day. Obviously there they hadn't beaten Kansas City in a while and got a tremendous quarterback and head coach there. To be able to beat those guys there was a huge thing. It was a great game. We lit it up.

I think to be able to come here with this defense, this is what really excited me here, because of the players and the leadership and the competitors and the warriors that the defense and offense has. To really be a part of that is what I'm excited about.

So I've never been a numbers guy. What I care about number one is wins. First thing. Second thing is touchdowns do matter. Those help those wins and solidify them.

I'm used to being in the end zone, and we got to make it a priority to get in there as much as we can.

Q. You talked about how you wanted to help get this team a championship. Based on what you know, what do you think they need out of the their quarterback to get to that point?

RUSSELL WILSON: Our job is to lead at the highest level every day. Being the first ones here, last ones to leave. More importantly, when you walk in the huddle with the other ten, you got to make them believe that every play is gonna be a great one. That eye contact, love, passion, energy for that, you know, is a very particular thing. Also, too, it's a swagger, confidence, it's a know-how as well.

So this game, you know, I've been fortunate like I said to play in this game a long time. Had some great comebacks and great moments and different things that have happened along the way.

I think that's -- experience is definitely important. It's definitely important. Definitely brings something. But once when I was a rookie, I used to always say experience is

only necessary for those who are unqualified. You got to be qualified for it. I've been fortunate to be qualified for it for a while.

Got to keep doing it and keep bringing it every day.

Q. Have you had a chance to talk to Arthur Smith?

RUSSELL WILSON: Yeah, I got to talk to Arthur for a little bit. Haven't had the chance to talk ball really yet. I think we got a chance to just spend some time. I've admired him from a distance in terms of what he did at Tennessee in particular. Being a head coach is a challenge in this league. This guy over here, Coach Tomlin has done it for, I don't know, 17, 18.

MIKE TOMLIN: Just a few.

RUSSELL WILSON: It's a hard thing to do. One of the things he's always done is know how to score points and get guys open. Obviously the run game is a really, really good thing here. Got the star running backs in the backfield that can really do some special things, so we want to get the ball to those guys, receivers and playmakers to be able to make plays.

So I think as we dive into it over the next month, next couple months really, I think the best part is that he's got a passion for the game. That's really what you want to feel coming in.

I got five to seven more years of ball that I really want to be the best that I can be. Who you marry up with matters. I think that I'm excited to work with Coach Arthur Smith. I know he's a great.

Q. You seem really eager to reach out to some of your teammates. How important is it to you to establish a relationship with some of the guys knowing you're the outside guy coming in?

RUSSELL WILSON: Yeah, I think it's super important. As I mentioned earlier, the leadership here is so powerful, so strong. It's definitely evident. Just to be a part of that, like I said, guys like Cam, Minkah, obviously guys like TJ, and just be a part of that, I think that's a critical part.

Also, too, it's time under tension. I think at the end of the day you got to be able to go out on the field and do it, number one. Obviously the games and the practice and all that, but really the part I love most is the weight room, being able to work out with the guys.

Once I signed I was fortunate enough to be able to go in the weight room and work out with some of the guys and

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

get a sweat on and get after it. That's the part where you really bond and enjoy. I think it's the dinners, like last night, different things you got to do with guys and the fellowship of that is the best part about this game.

Q. Dinner last night?

RUSSELL WILSON: Yeah, had some of the guys. Cam, Freiermuth, Connor, and some of the other guys as well. Got to spend some time with James Harrison, different people.

And so it was -- Mr. Charlie Batch himself. Different guys. It was a good experience. Just talking about the Pittsburgh Steelers was pretty cool.

Q. You mentioned that you got a chance to go around the city and get the vibe. You shared that on social media. What did you see about the city of Pittsburgh and its people?

RUSSELL WILSON: The great thing about this city and really this football team, too, it's a place where hard work is everything. I come from Richmond, Virginia. Both parents worked. Dad was a lawyer but had to work two jobs at times just so I could go to private school and make it, just go there and have a chance there.

And pay for my brother's school, football and basketball and baseball, all the things we were trying to do. My sister as well.

Mom was an ER nurse and worked late at night. I used to see her come home early in the mornings and take us to school.

So I grew up with that. I grew up with hard work in front of me. I think that was something I love my parents for. My dad is no longer here but passed that on to me, my brother, and my sister. Hopefully I can pass that on to my children. I got four children. Future is nine, Siena is six, Win - only one way to spell that, W-i-n, and he's three. I got Amora who's three months.

So to be able to show them what hard work looks like, you know, to be able to also show them to take risk in life and challenges and goals and write them out and put -- write out the vision, write it out plain so people can see it and run to it.

Writing it out and speaking life into every situation, that's who I am. I believe that hard work pays off. So it was cool to be -- and then the best part is they love sports.

I was going to try to go to the hockey game last night.

Couldn't make it because of dinner. Just I love sports. I love watching the culture of sports and how it brings people together. So that was cool, too.

Q. Patrick Queen was in here a couple minutes ago and he was asked about you. He said he's probably going to come in here with a little bit of chip championship on his shoulder. Does it feel that way as a competitor?

RUSSELL WILSON: 100%. I think that there is -- every day you wake up there is something to prove. You want to be the best version of you. You got a certain edge. You know, this place does, too, has an edge. It's not just me. There are things that we want to do and accomplish and goals.

So we got to go take it, go do it. That's what we plan on doing.

Q. Did that have something to do with you had great success in Seattle and two disappointing seasons in Denver.

RUSSELL WILSON: I think it's all about how you look a little bit. I think in life, a lot of times when things don't go your way you can look at it as disappointing or growth moments. For me, my first year, I had my lat. I was playing on it, pushing through it.

Should I have done that? You compete every day. You got to do what you got to do. I think everything didn't go our way the first year. This past year I felt like myself again.

You know, so I can't wait to just put on the cleats and go after it.

Q. Building off that, what do you take from your two years in Denver to apply to the situation here?

RUSSELL WILSON: I think that it's kind of like relationships. You know, it's like every relationship you learn from a different experience, but you also don't want to look at the good things and the bad things that happen in a relationship and try to marry it up with the good ones.

I think for me there has been a lot of great things, a lot of good things for me. I got to meet some amazing friends, teammates, Courtland Sutton and guys like Javonte Williams and different guys I got to be around. Guys like Burton and Jaleel McLaughlin, rookie that I got to speak life into him. Brandon Johnson. Some great people. Garrett Bolles. Different guys I got to build with over the time. DJ Jones and so many others. The people you got to walk

into the building with.

Listen, if I look back at it all so far, I've been on the winning side a lot of it. Some people haven't. Some people have. So you look at it and just you don't get to pinpoint on one moment or one play or two plays or two years or whatever it is. You look at the whole grand scope of it all.

I think when you're painting the picture of your career at the end, hopefully you're able to paint the beautiful picture you always imagined. Sometimes the best stuff, there is bumps and bruises along the way.

For me, I'm looking forward to just competing and being the best version of me every day. That's the best part. That's what you bring to the table. You bring the leadership, enthusiasm, edge. You don't fall off the edge, but you bring it and the love for the game and the passion and the process.

So that's what I'm looking forward to bringing. That's what I'm going to bring. That's what we're going to do together, and it's a journey together.

Q. Reaching out to Kenny, what was his reaction to you?

RUSSELL WILSON: Yeah, it was let's make this team better, let's do all that stuff. It was positive, forward. Let's go do it.

Q. Just wanted to ask, been a few years since the Steelers won a playoff game. Have you felt that sense of urgency? Is that one reason you were attracted to this?

RUSSELL WILSON: Yeah, I think the sense of urgency of Coach Tomlin and Omar and the staff and players as well. Talked to the leadership guys and guys like Cam, Minkah, and TJ. The edge, the desire to win, work ethic is very evident. When you walk in the building you feel it, sense it, know it. When you work out with the guys in the weight room you see it.

So this is a town that's won a lot. The best part about it is that we can control today. We can't control tomorrow or what's ahead, but he can work for it and go for it and dream about it. We got to capitalize on the opportunities. This is just the beginning of it. I'm excited for it.

It's going to be a great journey. Going to be a challenge. It's not going to be easy.

But it's going to worth it at the end, and going to make it worth it and do everything we can to be the best version of

us.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports