

# Pittsburgh Steelers

## Media Conference

Wednesday, July 24, 2024  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach Mike Tomlin

### Weekday Press Conference



MIKE TOMLIN: Good afternoon. Really exciting day for us to get started. First just some necessary business. All are present and accounted for in terms of attendance.

Just did our conditioning test. Really good experience. Did a little something different this year, but really excited about it. Just exposing them to that and gathering information, just gauging the readiness of this group.

Really an impressive collective from that perspective. We got three guys that will be on the list, two PUP guys, Dean Lowry and Cole Holcolm obviously with pre-existing injury, and C Patterson will be on the nonfootball injury list. Got a hammy that he hurt down south in training.

So got three guys that will start off kind of as nonparticipants in this process. That's really kind of the laundry list if you will of necessary business. Just really excited about getting this group in this environment.

We appreciate coming up to Latrobe. Don't take it for granted. We realize that in 2024 we're in a minority in terms of teams that go away to a destination camp.

We're excited about that. We're really excited about the winning edge that we believe it provides us. We think we have an opportunity to capture that which you can't measure in an environment like this: that understanding, that respect, that growth that's associated with informal time that groups get a chance to spend together in an environment like this. It's something that we're cognizant of and really intentional about teeing up.

We've got some regular business that everybody is going to obviously be involved in in terms of practicing and meetings and installs and so forth. Excited about that as well. So really excited about getting started. Got a lot of new people, new coaches, new players.

I'm not taking anything for granted. Obviously I've been up here a lot over the years, but I'm just making a real conscious effort to do a good job of communicating, telling

people why, making sure people understand locations and things of that nature, the things that you do at the very beginning stages of an environment like that.

My experience is not our group's experience, so I'm not taking anything for granted in terms of laying the foundation for our stay.

I'll pause and open it up for questions.

### **Q. Was there a scientific method or reason for doing the morning practices during the week?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We were just really pressed for time after practice in terms of our night meetings. Oftentimes we're making corrections and coaching points the following morning. It's just better for teaching and learning when you get that immediate feedback.

So we just bought ourselves more time on the backside of our day so we could have more immediate feedback based on the tape we put out that day.

It's just some challenges to the 11-hour workday in a setting like this, so we moved the practice back a little bit in an effort to -- for that, but also, oftentimes guys are rushed at dinner and we want to make sure we do a good job of feeding the guys and that they're bringing an appropriate appetite to dinner.

Those are a couple by-products and reasons why we're moving the practice to earlier in the day.

### **Q. Beyond just moving the practice earlier, you just mentioned a couple different changes, conditioning, when you guys are meeting. What is the motivation behind some of those changes?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We're forever changing. I don't know that that is anything different. Every year we are trying to figure out how to do things better, more professional, in an effort to produce a better finished product, a collective that's ready for action.

And so it's just part of our process. Sometimes we come across new technology and want to explore. Sometimes



it's based on notes from previous experience. Sometimes it's interesting things that come with new people from other places.

We don't care where good solutions come from. The key for us is just to continually work to find a better team development process.

**Q. What was the difference in this conditioning test versus how you've done it before?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Just a new strength staff that brings a new perspective from outside the organization. I'm always open to the new things associated with new personnel.

**Q. What went into scheduling a joint practice at the end of camp? Not something you guys have done recently.**

MIKE TOMLIN: Particularly with the new kickoff, just interested in getting some work against other people. Most of the time when you do joint practices, a lot is about special teams and young guys getting intentional work. That's the spirit in which we're going into it.

Obviously going to get some offense versus defense and things of that nature, but if you're really talking about what stimulated or sincere interest in doing it this year is just really great special teams work.

**Q. You guys are only one of (indiscernible) clubs to do camp fully away from home. Why does that continue to be such a valuable experience for you guys to be away?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Like I mentioned, that we value that which we cannot measure. The camaraderie, mutual understanding and respect gained in informal time spent.

At the end of the day our work is done, but there is picnic tables being guys young teach old, guys get to know one another in each other's journey. It's individual and collective growth in those opportunities.

That's why we value this awesome venue.

**Q. You've had a couple months to get around Russell Wilson. Is there anything that stands out this you learned being around him in the last few months?**

MIKE TOMLIN: He likes to work. I just think that that is a really good place to begin. He's highly conditioned. He brings a unique approach to the weight room maybe for a guy that plays his position.

There is a lot of interesting things about him in terms of his appetite for work that's really attractive.

**Q. Russ have pole position to be the starter?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Nothing has changed.

**Q. How do you plan on working the reps with him and Justin?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Very carefully. You guys are going to ask me daily about the rep allocations, and no way. I've been on the job too long for that.

**Q. How much will approach how you will use Cam Sutton knowing he'll be suspended to start the season?**

MIKE TOMLIN: His suspension has not bearing on his work in this environment.

**Q. Can you use Pat Freiermuth in a wide receiver role from time to time? If so, why?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know what you mean by that. In terms of splitting them out, we have done that in the past. No issues there. Most of the time in two tight end sets he's often the one displaced with the core and acts like a wide receiver as you say.

**Q. Najee was asked today if he was ever given an, nation as to why the fifth year option was declined. His response was that he was told that team didn't know which direction the offense was headed. Is there anything about the direction that the offense is headed that would go away from Najee?**

MIKE TOMLIN: No need for me to add any more to his answer to your question. If that's what he was told, that's what he was told.

**Q. What has Arthur Smith brought to your offense early on?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think that remains to be seen. It's day one. We just checked in. In the spring we doing teaching and learning. It's really kind of a macro approach if you will. All of those things will be revealed as we get into the nitty-gritty components of that.

Anything that's said at this juncture is speculation and I don't want to mislead you.

**Q. Coach, you spoke about new faces. Your thoughts on how things looked day one, receivers, rookies, free**

## **agent additions?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We haven't done a thing other than condition test. Again, not a lot to report in term of what they look like in it terms of football. I'll have more answers in regard to that tomorrow.

**Q. For the guys on the list is there optimistic or hope that they'll be...**

MIKE TOMLIN: No question. No question.

**Q. Patterson is the one we didn't know about before. Was that something...**

MIKE TOMLIN: You can characterize it as day to day at this juncture. We'll see where it leads us.

**Q. You talked a lot about last season about the advantages to waiting for the rookies, to wait until second half of the season so they didn't hit that rookie wall. Do you imagine a similar approach this year or could those guys see earlier action?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, what I do is based on individuals and it's not just a cookie cutter approach. It's based on the maturation and maturity and readiness of individuals, and so what may have applied to last year's class may not apply to this year's class.

I think a lot of this year's class are older guys than maybe last year's class. Bunch of fifth year guys and things of that nature in this class. There might be more immediate maturity and readiness.

In a nutshell, I don't paint with a broad brush. We make decisions on an individual basis, and I don't know if the front part of your question reflects our agenda regarding the whole class or maybe just a few individuals, like Joe Porter, Jr. is who I think you're referring to.

I don't know if it's indicative of the class.

**Q. Somebody asked Landon about the year they won the Super Bowl, camp was really good that year. He said every year we think camp is good. I feel like that's the way your attitude is. You ever have bad camp?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I judge camp based on how we perform. The purpose of is to divide the labor up to get a sense of who you were individually and collectively, to teach and to learn, to tee you up for the season.

And so we all want to feel good this time of year. We are all undefeated. If you're looking for some of that you can

find it. For me, I just been at it long enough I know there is a lot of work to be done. Those bills are going to come due inside stadiums.

**Q. How interested are you to see the large group of new core receivers going against similarly in some places reconstructed parts of your secondary, how they work off each other?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm interested in all of that. I think there are questions you can apply that same thing to every position group. How are the new young offensive linemen going to against the young emerging defensive front, Benton and others.

I think that's why we're here. You know, it's a lot of speculation until we roll at that ball out. That's the beautiful component of team building and these opportunities that are NFL training camps.

Guys are not going to talk their way on the teams. They're not going to talk their way up the depth chart. They will get an opportunity to compete and pit their skills and talents against others. That's an exciting component the camp.

**Q. What's your favorite thing about this time of year being at training camp?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, I like so much of it to be quite honest with you. Every year about the 5th of July the summer is over for me, you know what I mean? It's the same this year. I had a great summer, but I'm glad to be here.

**Q. Mike, have you to pull back on Cam's reps a little bit, Cam Heyward, considering he's coming off some surgeries and he's 35?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know about coming off surgery. This guy has over 10,000 career snaps. Snaps in a setting like can this less important to him than for Benton. Let's be transparent and honest.

**Q. Speaking of Keanu Benton, it's year two. I know expectations go up for year two guys.**

MIKE TOMLIN: Absolutely.

**Q. What are you expecting for Keanu.**

MIKE TOMLIN: Big things. Big things.

**Q. Coach Dunbar talked about him needing to finish more when we talked to him during OTAs. What was the emphasis as far as when you look at his film the things he does need to do to finish more?**

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MIKE TOMLIN: You know, he can grow in all areas. I don't know what you're talking about regarding the finish. I don't have any issue with his hustle or conditioning. But he's a talented young guy with tremendous upside, room for growth in all areas.

**Q. I assume you brought Tyler Matakevich as special teams coach. Are you of the opinion that linebackers are going to be a bigger part of the kickoff coverage unit than they used to be?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I know proven capable teamers are significant when you are faced with the unknown in the kickoff. Regardless of position, Tyler is a known commodity in that space, one we're familiar with, one that everybody in the National Football League is familiar with.

Just prudent business facing what we're facing in terms of unknown, the impact of that play on our game.

**Q. Could that kickoff rule (indiscernible) your roster just a little?**

MIKE TOMLIN: It may, certainly. You know, late summer willingness to do business with guys like Tyler here is a component of it certainly.

**Q. One development since mini camp was the announcement that Hard Knocks was going to be around the team at some point this year. What was your reaction to that even though it's still a ways?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Yeah, it's so far off I don't know that I have a reaction at this point. I haven't had any pertinent meetings regarding it, the logistical component and things of that nature.

Just to give a blanket statement, I'm not overly concerned about it to be quite honest with you. The people we compete most intimately with are faced with the same issues. From that standpoint, it's fair.

We'll get to it when we get to it. It's just too many challenges in front of us right now for me to be overly preoccupied with that.

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