

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Mike Tomlin

Weekday Press Conference

MIKE TOMLIN: Good afternoon. First I'll start with some of our business regarding player availability.

Isaac can be described as out this week, but we did get good news regarding his pec injury. We'll characterize it as week to week and see where next week leads us, but really optimistic about his returning sooner rather than later.

We had a couple of guys working in a partial capacity yesterday in our bonus day, and we expect that to continue and increase as we push towards game time. Those guys are Roman Wilson and Troy Fautanu. We're optimistic about both guys. Jaylen Warren can also be included in that discussion, along with Cory Trice.

We had some guys dealing with some short-term misery regarding injury, but those guys that I mentioned appear to be turning the corner and moving toward availability.

We'll watch as we go through the week, make sure we don't get any negative trends. Not only from a health standpoint, some of these guys don't have extended resumes, so we'll be watching the quality of their play as well, as we reengage them in this readying process.

Let's talk Atlanta here briefly. They've got a new staff, and that creates some challenges, particularly in week 1. Got intimate knowledge regarding their staff. Obviously got a close relationship with Raheem Morris. I've known Jimmy Lake, their defensive coordinator, for probably 20 years. I know Zac Robinson as well. I've got a lot of respect for those guys.

But week 1 presents some challenges in terms of forecasting what their personalities might be in all three phases. They didn't play a lot of their starters in the preseason, and obviously even from a schematic standpoint, you get limited exposure to what people's intentions are regarding the preseason and what it is that they do.



But we know the schools of thought that these guys come from. So we've been preparing with that understanding. Obviously I worked with Raheem Morris, and he's made his bones on the defensive side of the ball. He was in L.A. last year along with Jimmy Lake. We played those guys with the Rams, so we have that as a point of reference.

One thing I know about Coach Morris and company, he's going to utilize the talents of the people at his disposal. Some of the things that they did in L.A. will be similar to what they do in Atlanta, some of the things will be different, largely based on people and putting them in position to play well.

We've got some challenges from that perspective. On the other side of the ball, same thing. Zac was in L.A. last year. We played those guys. He's worked alongside Sean McVay for a number of years, and you understand the challenges that come with that, their utilization of personnel, their utilization of pace in a variety of ways, situationally, field locations, et cetera.

The awesome job that they do in terms of marrying the run game along with run action and misdirections and screens and so forth in non-situational moments. I expect them to do and reflect some of those things, but also I'm excited to maybe see what personal touches he brings to it. There was some evidence of that in the preseason, but not a lot, as I mentioned.

Again, you work some high volume things generally in the preseason. Some things you hold back.

We've got to be really, really fundamentally good in this game like a lot of teams do in week 1. There's always an element of the unknown that always accompanies week 1 competition. The better you are fundamentally, the higher your floor, the better you position yourself for success.

Baseline things like presnap execution on both sides of the ball is going to be really critical. Our ability to manage the play clock on offense, clean, presnap shifts in motions and so forth will be a weapon for us. On defense, snap readiness, motion and shift adjustments, communications that go along with those adjustments.

How we deal with the environment. First time playing on the road and some of the challenges that come with working in a hostile environment offensively. Those are some of the baseline things that really have our attention, coupled with the lack of schematic knowledge about what their intentions might be because they got a new staff.

Talk about some things that we do know, some significant players for them. Starting on offense, Kirk Cousins obviously is a catalyst for them. They went out and acquired a savvy veteran quarterback who has experience in this system, the system which he provided in Minnesota, was really born out of that same L.A. Rams system that they're going to utilize in Atlanta, and that's what made him such an attractive acquisition for them.

I think they've got, what, three top 10 draft picks on offense in recent years in Bijan Robinson and Drake London and Pitts. So you package that young, talented group with a savvy veteran quarterback that makes good and fast decisions the way that Kirk does and you see the vision of what they're trying to do offensively.

Kirk always gets the ball out quickly. I imagine that's going to be his agenda and their agenda, given the fact he's coming off an injury, but that is very much in his wheelhouse, and I'm sure they're going to do some schematic things to keep him clean in that regard.

More than anything, it's about distributing the ball to the variety of people that are really capable that I mentioned earlier. Bijan Robinson is top tier. He can do a lot of things. He can stop/start. He can stick his foot in the ground and juke. He can put together multiple cuts. He's a home run hitter. He's the first running back taken there last year, and I think his skill set and what he was able to put on tape last year really kind of reflect that.

Drake London and Kyle Pitts, man, are matchup issues. They really are. Both of them are big bodied guys who can play the ball above eye level and are vertical threats. As I mentioned, both guys are top 10 draft picks, and I just think that is reflective of their pedigree and talents.

So we've got to be cautious about the matchup component of play as it pertains to those guys. They acquired Ray-Ray McCloud from San Fran. Ray-Ray has always been a dangerous return man and offensive gadget guy. I would imagine they're drawing some things up for him in that regard.

They've got a rock solid offensive line group. They really do. We competed against these guys just two years ago. They block things well schematically in terms of get can hats on hats, but they're also just really talented. They've

invested a lot in that group. They drafted a lot of them high. Several of them were in their second contracts. So that's a really strong collective.

On the defensive side of the ball, there's been some turnover there. They acquired Judon and Simmons in the developmental process. You're talking about two NFL football players whose resumes speak for themselves. Judon is multi-talented. He's got a really good feel for the game. He's capable of rushing from the right and the left. His production needs no endorsement from me. What he did in New England was really impressive, I think 10 and then 15. I think he had 4 when he got hurt last year.

We'd better be cognizant of what his capabilities are. Obviously we're familiar with him because he was a Baltimore Raven in the past, and obviously we played against him in New England as well. So he's something to be reckoned with from a rush perspective.

They've acquired Simmons to go along with Jessie Bates. So they've got a really savvy veteran safety tandem, one that specializes in taking the ball away. Let's be honest, both guys have taken the ball away wherever they've been. Simmons did so at Boston College and in Denver, and Jessie Bates did so in Wake Forest and Cincinnati and Atlanta last year, I think he had six.

We've got to do a really good job of managing the downfield component of play. Both of those guys are very capable, particularly in terms of taking the ball away.

A.J. Terrell is a topnotch coverage corner. So they've got a real solid secondary. They've acquired a topnotch rush man. As I mentioned, Raheem Morris has always done a really good job of utilizing the talents of the men that he coaches and having defensive schematics reflect that. We're going to have some real challenges kind of in that regard.

But it's week 1, really excited about it. The anticipation, the angst, if you will, that comes with this time of year, the excitement. I'm really excited about getting to know our group, and what better way to do it versus a group that's the caliber of the Atlanta Falcons in their venue.

So we respect it, and that's why we're preparing with an edge. We'll continue to do so. Had a good day yesterday. I'll pause and open it up for questions.

Q. How will the makeup of your offensive line look in regards to your tackles relative to maybe Troy's (indiscernible)?

MIKE TOMLIN: We'll determine that as we get closer to



game time. He was a partial participant yesterday, went well. We expect it to be more so tomorrow. The closer he gets to health, we'll have a better reflection of how we might divvy that up.

Obviously the first two guys are going to be participants. He potentially could be as well, and Spencer Anderson has played some tackle in the past as well.

I think those are the candidates, and what the mix is will be determined by how we distribute reps and how they perform in the reps given.

Q. You mentioned the challenges with the Atlanta Falcons and a new coaching staff. In what ways do you lean on Arthur Smith or use him because of his understanding of their personnel?

MIKE TOMLIN: Nothing out of the ordinary, to be honest with you. Obviously he has an understanding of a lot of their personnel. Everybody in the National Football League has personnel departments. It's our business to understand their personnel. I don't know we've had any earth shattering information provided in that regard.

Q. With some of the youthful nature of the offensive line and the receiving room, is it your belief that, even though Arthur Smith and Russell Wilson, their experience as a play caller can overcome some of that collective newness within the offense?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think their experience was an attractive component to both guys certainly.

Q. You mentioned Anderson. Is he the next man up at left guard?

MIKE TOMLIN: Yes, he is.

Q. With the depth of your offensive line kind of tested over the last few weeks, how have you seen the group still come together in terms of cohesion when they've had to deal with the testing?

MIKE TOMLIN: We've got a lot of guys in there. There's a lot of meat on that growth bone, and we've seen a lot of it, to be quite honest with you, for several reasons. We had some young guys that drafted high in the Draft and showed the NFL is not too big for them, and I imagine they'll continue to show that and continue to grow with exposure.

But we've also got some second year players like Broderick and Spencer, and that second lap around the track, it's reasonable to expect growth and development because of the knowing component. So we've challenged

them in that regard, and they've responded.

We've got some talented young people, so it makes for an exciting mix certainly.

Q. You've added some new players at receiver. What have you learned about the depth you have in that receiver corps?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm comfortable with the performance of these guys. Had some questions, even dating back to spring, and to be quite honest with you, I probably went into the receiver room a couple weeks into camp and told them that. I just believe in being really transparent.

But the consistency with which those guys performed in Latrobe and with team development has made me more comfortable, and specifically I'm talking about Scotty Miller and Van Jefferson. I just can't say enough about the consistency with which they've performed, their floor, if you will. They behave like veteran NFL players, and that's provided some comfort in the midst of the transition that comes with dealing with new people and getting acclimated in that way.

Q. Beanie didn't play in the second preseason game and split snaps in the third. What did he do to prove to you guys that he should be elevated?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know that he's done it yet. We have player elevation opportunities and things of that nature in the course of a work week that determines how we divide the labor up. Beanie is an exciting guy. We'll watch him during the week, along with some others, and we'll make decisions at the end of the week that's best suited for winning this game.

Q. Have you determined which side Broderick will do best on?

MIKE TOMLIN: No, I made no determinations regarding that. Obviously he's worked a lot at right, but again, we're going to continue to watch that as we progress through the week because versatility has been an asset for him and us.

Q. Heading into his third season, where do you think George Pickens has grown in his game and maturity-wise?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think he's grown in all areas, not only in terms of skill relative to his position, he has a lot of that, but the nuances of the game, getting in and out of cuts, hand selection, and so forth, he's grown in a lot of ways.

Obviously as a human, he's grown in the ways you would



expect young guys to grow in terms of knowledge of the game and what it means to be a professional and how to conduct yourself.

Q. Following up on the question about the wide receivers, after you guys traded Diontae, did you find the landscape of building that room more challenging?

MIKE TOMLIN: Not at all, to be quite honest with you. There is a plethora of receivers, not only in the Draft, but in free agency. You can look at that position in the top three rounds of the draft over the last five years, and it gives you an indication of the amount of talent and the readiness of that talent in recent years.

So we were really comfortable with it and not overly concerned about it, to be quite honest with you. We're really excited about Roman Wilson we got in the third round, for example. We've always done a nice job of acquiring receiver talent and not necessarily in the first round, and I just think that speaks to the depth and the readiness of the position.

Q. Do you think George is in a place where he'll be able to handle the extra attention he's going to get until these younger guys establish themselves?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think George has gotten attention all of his life as it pertains to football. I think that's nothing new to him.

Q. Are you confident he'll be able to handle it in a positive fashion?

MIKE TOMLIN: Absolutely.

Q. You mentioned Roman Wilson. How big of a role can you expect for him to have given the limited reps he had in training camp with the injury?

MIKE TOMLIN: We'll see. That's what the week of work is about certainly.

Q. Kyle Pitts is a pretty unique weapon at tight end with his athleticism. How do you organize a team effort to contain him along with the others?

MIKE TOMLIN: We see unique tight ends week in and week out, to be quite honest with you. We have some dangerous ones in this division. Njoku in Cleveland, Mark Andrews and Likely in Baltimore -- all of them are matchup issues.

It might be a challenge for some, but it's somewhat routine for us. Not being disrespectful of his talents, it's just we

see some really talented tight ends and ones that are the focal point of offenses.

Q. Do you think it's just a natural part of every week in the NFL?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know about regular for all, but somewhat regular for us because of the divisional component I just mentioned.

Q. Given all the moves you've made, or big moves, any more urgency or expectation for next year?

MIKE TOMLIN: You're absolutely right. I approach every season with a big time sense of urgency.

Q. Art talks about you guys need to score more points, and you guys have talked about it as a staff.

MIKE TOMLIN: More points relative to when?

Q. To before. You said I'd like to score more touchdowns.

MIKE TOMLIN: Arthur isn't toting those bags. Those bags aren't his.

Q. I'm talking about your boss, not Arthur Smith.

MIKE TOMLIN: I thought you were talking about Arthur Smith. I was going to say, those bags aren't his.

Q. Where do you see this offense? Do you believe it has more fire power than it did the last few years?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm not interested in making you comfortable today, to be quite honest with you. Those are just words, and really at the end of the day, it's somewhat meaningless.

We'll have an opportunity to put some tape out this weekend that's kind of reflective of that discussion. I'm more of a doer, not a talker.

Talking glowingly, particularly when you're undefeated this time of year is easy, and I'm not attracted to easy. We're just going to work, and we'll put tape out there that's reflective of our intentions.

Q. When you guys signed Russell Wilson, you said his drive is one of the most attractive things about him. How have you seen that translate and show up since he's been here?

MIKE TOMLIN: That's just who he is. I don't know if



there's a translation component of it. It's just who he is. You don't have the type of resume he has and have done it at the level he has for the length of time he has without bringing some unique traits and approaches to business. I think that's just been reflected in his day to day.

Q. What has Payton Wilson shown you throughout the course of team development?

MIKE TOMLIN: He's a talented guy. He's a quick and eager learner. He doesn't make a lot of mistakes twice. He's got a skill set that might allow him to contribute, particularly in some passing circumstances. He's an easy runner. He can cover people.

We'll just continue to carve out a role for him, but make no mistake, we're excited about the prospects and his talent level.

Q. You talked about in the past about Russell being bold. What makes a quarterback a good default?

MIKE TOMLIN: Arm strength and accuracy. Not only that, trajectory, and he brings all three. He's got arm strength. He's got pinpoint accuracy. He can drop the ball in your front right shirt pocket, if you will.

And his ability to throw the ball over defenders or power a ball in terms of being able to change his trajectory based on circumstances are some of the things that kind of comprise that discussion.

Q. At the running back position, do you guys have an ideal distribution of reps in your heads? How would Jaylen Warren's injury affect that in week 1 here?

MIKE TOMLIN: It remains to be seen in terms of the impact of his injury or his ability. We've got a week's worth of work ahead of us.

In terms of how we divided the labor up, that's going to be week to week. We've got some really capable guys. You throw C.P. into that mix as well. More than anything, I love the demeanor of that running back room. These guys don't run away from confrontation. They run to it.

That collective, those three guys, I'm really excited about. They're going to lead the charge for us in a lot of ways, that competitive component being a significant one.

Q. How have you found Russell's influence manifesting the most in what you've seen so far? Is it off the field stuff? Communication, calm in the huddle? What is it?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think the journey is really going to define that. I think, when you're undefeated, man, it's easy to point to glowing things, but really it's revealed during the challenges that is the journey in the season.

I'm not surprised that he's going to be positioned to do those things based on who he is and his experience, but it just happens if a really natural way. But the significant component of that discussion lies ahead certainly.

Q. Does it say anything to you about how Dan Moore has approached the past couple years? A first round guy, but he just seems to be always getting better?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think that's professional football. I think we're continually trying to replace people, and people better be continually getting better in an effort to sustain and grow, and that's kind of reflective of his approach and what's happened with him.

He's gotten better continually. He's gotten snap opportunities in an effort to do so. Obviously experience is a component, a significant component to get better. But I just think that's a really natural thing. I think that happens across all positions on every team at this level.

Competition is ever present. New talent, new competition is just a component of our game at this level.

Q. When you have two guys potentially making their first NFL starts on your line, do you rely on a Dan Moore and maybe a James Daniels to help get them through?

MIKE TOMLIN: They are going to have to make their plays. Dan is not going to block two people, you know what I mean? Certainly in terms of mindset and communication and things of that nature, but the guys that you mentioned are really capable, and they're going to be capable of absorbing their assignment and blocking their people.

Q. You've asked Spencer to do a lot of stuff. When you're a seventh rounder, you've got to do whatever you're asked to to make the team. What has stood out about his development?

MIKE TOMLIN: As I said earlier, his versatility was a calling card that allowed him to sustain, but the longer he's here, you'd better specialize in a certain area. Really his growth and development kind of reminds me a lot of Kelvin Beachum, if you remember years ago.

Versatility was kind of his calling card, but then he settled into the tackle position and went on to -- Beach might still

be playing. I think he is.

Spence will be fortunate if he has a Kelvin Beachum-like story.

Q. Are you looking for other ways to get Nick Herbig on the field? Has he gotten to that point where he's earning other reps or other looks?

MIKE TOMLIN: We're interested in playing everybody that's capable of helping us. Mont Adams, Leal. It's not an 11-man job, particularly in week 1 as you meet the challenges of conditioning, in game conditioning. So we're going to cast a big net from a participation standpoint.

I would imagine that a lot of people are, globally speaking, as we get acclimated to in season conditioning and the workload associated with playing 60 or 60-plus minutes.

Q. Do you notice anything different about Zach Frazier in the way he kind of approaches things since Nate's injury and it's kind of become clear that he's going to be the starter?

MIKE TOMLIN: I haven't sensed any difference at all in his approach, to be quite honest with you.

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