

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Mike Tomlin

Weekday Press Conference

MIKE TOMLIN: Good afternoon. As always, I'll start with a quick synopsis of our last performance.

Really I have the same sentiments that I had after the game. Man, it's hard to win in this league. I'm grateful to sit here at 2-0 with two road games to get us started.

There was a certain level of comfort with the road game environment in Atlanta. We've been in Atlanta quite a bit here in recent years. Really comfortable with the amount of support and stuff that we get in Atlanta.

Was highly concerned environmentally about Denver. Hadn't been in that environment I don't think since maybe 2018 as a collective. Know the intensity of their fan base, how loud that venue can be. Really concerned about the environmental components of the matchup.

I thought we did a nice job of kind of minimizing that, particularly in the early portions of the game. We stayed on schedule, we ran the ball, utilized quarterback mobility sometimes in situational moments to minimize some of that.

We were able to push through the red zone and put seven on the board. Seven points as opposed to field goals, has a way of doing some of those things.

I was really pleased with our ability to (indiscernible) some of the environmental things. I liked the way our guys communicated in game. I liked their just approach to preparation regarding the environment.

Also as I mentioned as the game unfolded I got displeased with the amount of penalties we absorbed, really in all three phases. We had a penalty in the return game that minimized our return games. That's two times in two games that we had a penalty in the return game.

We feel like we had dynamic return people that hadn't had an opportunity to reveal itself yet. You don't have the chance to get the return game going until play penalty-free



in that space. We need to clean that component of our play up.

We were penalized some on defense. Man, that minimized our efforts in some situations, particularly some of the pre-snap penalties. We were in the neutral zone some. That's not characteristic of us, giving away yardage. We got to get back in the lab on that.

On offense, man, holding, particularly September in the NFL is going to kill drives. You're not collectively mature enough to overcome behind-the-chain circumstances that holding and so forth puts you in.

Offensively, particularly in the second half, man, we didn't have a great deal of an opportunity to control the game in the ways that we'd like to because we got behind the sticks. You get behind sticks in a hostile environment, you're shutting down drives particularly in September.

I thought those were the components of the game that really captured my attention.

I thought the guys played hard, they played together, they were engaged. They smiled in the face of adversity that naturally happens in game. You're looking for some of those things in the early stages of development.

As we get into this thing, guys going to have an opportunity to ascend for a variety of reasons and show what they're capable of. I was pleased with Troy's first action of the year, if you will. Got a couple young guys that I think are doing really good. Zach Frazier in his second game, Spencer at left guard playing in place of Isaac. We got some young people that are really representing themselves in a positive way.

Same can be said on defense. Cory Trice is somebody to speak of that's been through a lot. Second-year player, but second football game, having lost his rookie season due to a major injury. That was significant play as there was in the football game, that red zone, end zone interception that he provided.

Still getting a lot of beautiful contributions from people that might not be new to professional football, but are new to



us. Pruitt, people like that on offense, D. Elliott, D. Jack, Patrick Queen on defense. We got some guys that are new to us, might not be new to the National Football League but are new to us. We're getting some awesome contributions from them.

Our communication and cohesion is not suffering as much as it could. I'm appreciative of the attention, urgency, professionalism that some of those new experienced players bring.

You can get to know somebody in the process, but you really get to know them once you step into these regular season bowls and are faced with the challenges that are our business. It's good to get to know some of these guys.

Justin is included in that. The development of our relationship and me getting to know and understand him, him getting to understand me, it just grows in in-game environments.

There's some point in the game I went up to him, I told him to challenge his unit in terms of cleaning up their play so we can get out of the stadium and end the game. I asked him to do it in his own voice and words. Those are some of the things you ask a quarterback to do.

It's not fun or realistic to fake that sometimes. So it's just really good to kind of be in in-game circumstances and get an opportunity to work together in ways that coaches and leaders, specifically in that instance quarterbacks, have to do in an effort to land the plane or get the desired result.

Some injury things to speak of in game. Tyler had a hamstring. I don't have a report on his status as I sit here today. I think he's being evaluated as we speak.

The same thing can be said about Pruitt's knee. Ben has a shoulder, although we've been elevating Ben. He hasn't been on the 53-man roster. Shoulder discomfort at the end of the game.

A lot of those guys, I don't have information on their status as I sit here today. That stuff is ongoing. As always, we include guys as they're capable of participating in preparation. For new and young guys, the sooner that happens, the more consideration they're under. For older guys, we'll give them some latitude as a general practice. We'll see what the week holds for some of those guys in terms of some of their roles.

A guy like Tyler Matakevich, if he perks up at the end of the week, he is a veteran core team guy that has been with us before. I'll leave a light on for him, for instance.

Some ongoing injury issues that we've been managing. Isaac might be closer to return. We won't speculate. We'll just simply continue to ready the guys that are available until we get an understanding that he is available. That's oftentimes dictated by the level of participation and the quality of that participation in practice. We'll see what the week holds in terms of him. But he is getting close. It's good to follow his participation during the course of the week.

Really we're kind of in the same posture as we were in last week with Russ. As I sit here today, Russ is not scheduled to be a full participant in practice. We're readying a plan that features Justin and his readiness. We'll follow Russ throughout the week. If his participation gets to a level, participation and quality where we should consider him, we'll delve into that at that time. Obviously when that happens is a component of the consideration.

As I sit here today, he is not scheduled to be a full participant tomorrow in practice. So we're readying ourselves around Justin. We'll stay in that mindset until something else happens. Hypotheticals is a waste of our time.

Push forward towards the Chargers. Really excited about this matchup. Excited for a lot of reasons. It's our first home game. Nothing like playing in Acrisure for us. We respect it. But it's still exciting nonetheless.

We realize that we got a lot to do with what goes on in that environment. In that spirit we're preparing with an edge. I'm also excited because we're playing a dominant 2-0 football group, a group that's done as much as you can do at the early stages of the season. They've won some games in convincing fashion. They've controlled the line of scrimmage in both games. They've taken the ball away, done a nice job of securing the ball in both games. They play to a definitive personality, one that I am very familiar with, although they are new as a collective.

If you talk about the offense, man, it starts first and foremost with the architect Greg Roman. Have a lot of respect for Greg. Competed against him a lot over the years obviously in the AFC North.

A lot of what we see on tape is very familiar. He has a mode of operation. But all the good ones do. I would imagine he doesn't care that we know his mode of operation, but that's why he is who he is in this game. The tape looks like that.

He's got some familiar people, guys that have experience within his system. J.K. and Gus in the backfield, but also Bozeman at center, Hurst and Tomlinson at tight end.

You're talking about some guys, there's a splattering of guys throughout the offense who have experience there. It's aided in a way in terms of them building that foundation of that culture. When you got some guys that nod in that knowing way, have been around you before, it's an asset to you.

They look mature beyond two games in terms of their collective unit maturity. Obviously J.K. and Gus got a lot to do with that, guys that have played within the scheme, understand what he's trying to get done, have talents that fit that scheme. It's going to be a big challenge for us. I mean, they're running to and through defenses. We're working with an edge with respect to that.

They also have some dangers in the passing game. Can't say enough about Justin Herbert and his talents not only as a thrower, but his mobility is a challenge. The first time we played him, first time we were in a stadium with him, we as a collective, myself included, was surprised by his athleticism.

I think it played a major factor in terms of how the game was unfolding. Man, he ran up and down the field on us, scrambles and so forth, extended plays. A significant component of the outcome of that game. We've been in the stadium with him before. We're not speculating about the impact of his mobility. We've experienced it. There's no substitute for experience in that regard. We got some challenges to deal with their offense.

On the defensive side, man, their coordinator Jesse Minter, I feel like I've known him all his life. I worked for his dad Rick years ago at the University of Cincinnati when Jesse was a high school guy. He spent a lot of time with me. I was a secondary coach, he was a defensive back at the time. He and I had a lot to talk about. He would work out with my guys when he could. I followed his career a lot over the years.

Got a lot of respect for the groundwork that he's laid. He is really playing to his personality. Watched a lot of Michigan tape a year ago obviously because of the number of draft-eligible guys they had, the amount of success that they had.

The schematics are very similar. He's doing a lot of the similar things. He's getting after people. He's aggressive. He's multiple. He's got some awesome (indiscernible) zones, one-dimensional circumstances, that he unleashes at you when you're behind the chains, passing circumstances. He has an awesome pressure package that highlight the talents of his edge people.

When you're talking about their defense, you're talking

about Bosa and Mack no doubt. If you think about the edge people he coached at Michigan in recent years, Hutchinson and others. He hasn't been devoid of edge talent. He knows how to utilize it. Really the tape is very reflective of that.

Styles make fights. These guys play ball in a lot of ways similar to us. There's going to be some challenges. It should be exciting because of it.

But really as I sit here on a Tuesday, that's just food for energy and urgency from the preparation process. When you're facing a big game, man, it's about the destination, it's about the journey. I'm excited about walking the preparation of this journey with our guys man.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that. We're still very much in the growth and development stages as a collective in terms of how we go about the business of building and engineering victory from Monday all the way up until the ball gets kicked off.

We're learning every week. We're making small alterations or big alterations where necessary in an effort to continue the growth and development of this unit.

Those of you that normally follow us know we normally bring in officials on Friday for practice. We're bringing in officials for Wednesday, Thursday and Friday this week. I believe that's appropriate given our last outing in that regard in terms of not playing penalty-free.

We're not hoping and wishing our issues away, we have to take tangible action, particularly at the early portions of the year where we're laying down some guardrails in terms of what we value, how we go about business, how we take corrective action to improve and increase our chances of winning. It's just ball that goes with September. We better be really urgent about it.

I'll pause and open it up for questions.

Q. What happened in Denver, whatever plans you had for using Broderick Jones?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's did in game. I had intentions of utilizing both guys. I acknowledged that Troy was healthy. I acknowledge that Troy was capable. That's why we started him. I rolled him because I had concerns about his level of conditioning.

He's a young guy, new to me. He's new to the NFL. I didn't know how fatigue would affect his play in terms of detail. So we tried to ward off some of that.

I had every intention of using Broderick. When Broderick started getting highly penalized in play, I backed off it and I held my breath and played Troy.

Q. How about this one?

MIKE TOMLIN: We will see where roads lead. We will see. We have a week of preparation. I'd be disrespectful to Wednesday, Thursday and Friday if I had a hardcore plan about how I was going to roll those guys.

Man, I'm going to give Broderick an opportunity to rebound. He's a talented young player. I am sure he suffered some disappointment in terms of Troy starting. It's a natural thing. But he has to move past it and I have to give him an opportunity to move past it as a leader.

We'll get into this week. We'll let participation be our guide and the quality of participation for both guys be our guide in terms of how we divvy up this week. It's a new week.

Q. You said they're not collectively mature. How so?

MIKE TOMLIN: It takes some time on task together to overcome first and 20. That's what I mean.

Q. Is there something about Broderick heading into this game or was it more what Troy was doing?

MIKE TOMLIN: It was more reflective of what Troy was doing. Troy had been lighting it up. I don't talk a lot during the pre-season particularly about rookies because it doesn't help me and it doesn't help them. But based on my actions in terms of putting him in the lineup, I'm sure you have an understanding of what I was looking at in terms of development.

Q. You haven't rotated tackles. Is that something you consider a viable long-term option?

MIKE TOMLIN: Rotation doesn't bother me when everyone is capable. Everyone is capable. I have very little knowledge about Troy's level of conditioning, so it was appropriate.

Q. Outside of the penalties, is there anything else concerning Broderick's play that has led to Troy?

MIKE TOMLIN: The penalties were enough for the reasons I just mentioned. It is difficult for units to overcome first and 20 at any point in the journey, but particularly in week two or week three.

You better work or tail off to be penalty-free, particularly when you're in hostile environments, getting

one-dimensional in places like Denver. You can essentially shut a drive down. That's why we did the things we did.

Q. What have you seen from Dan Moore?

MIKE TOMLIN: Dan has been solid. Dan has been Dan. Dan is never moved by what's going on around him. There's a maturity to his approach to business. Oftentimes it is reflected in the consistency of his play.

Q. Your relationship with Justin Fields, how do you evaluate his decision making on the field?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's been really good. But I expect it to be.

Q. Did Justin do enough to earn the starting job outright?

MIKE TOMLIN: Again, I'm not talking hypotheticals. We have one of these two guys available to us as I stand here today. It's a waste of my time to speculate, hypotheticals, all of that.

Justin has a game to get ready for this week. I'm not doing him any justice by talking hypothetical. I want him focused. I'm focused on the next task. Until Russell gets to a state of readiness where he's a consideration, I won't be speculating on any of that in any way.

Q. Justin has only 12 passes beyond the sticks. How have you liked how he's picked his shots or assess how he's taken those shots?

MIKE TOMLIN: That's not only reflective of his capabilities and mindset, that's probably reflective of our mindset as a collective. We want to be aggressive in terms of going downfield, but we also want to be prudent because incomplete passes and things of that nature get you behind the sticks. We've been in hostile environments through two weeks that we wanted to minimize.

It's important, guys, in September that you avoid third-and-long, particularly if your first two games are on the road. We have been really thoughtful and intentional about our approach to business through the first two weeks because of environmental reasons and our lack of collective development, the number of young people we've had in some significant positions, like center, left guard, so forth.

Q. You said you learn about guys in stadium. What have you learned about Justin?

MIKE TOMLIN: He loves to compete. He's got a quiet



confidence about him. He doesn't change in environments. There's a clarity in his communication, in his response to communications, really comfortable.

Q. On Broderick, do you plan to consider to cross-train him? What advantages do you see?

MIKE TOMLIN: We've been doing that. That was going to be his role regardless of who starts and who doesn't. He is the most position guy of the three to swing. So he's been the swing.

Q. After the Buffalo pre-season games, he said he didn't have the (indiscernible). He said the same thing in Denver. When you hear something like that, does that concern you or is that a maturity thing?

MIKE TOMLIN: I didn't hear that. I don't know under what circumstances he said that. Oftentimes guys are just trying to answer questions appropriately and move on with their day. I don't put a whole lot of stake in some of those emotional things that are said by guys after games in an effort to be professional and answer the questions of media types.

Q. 62 yards in the second half after having a pretty solid first half. What do you feel went wrong in the second half?

MIKE TOMLIN: A lot. We got to perform better. We got to perform cleaner. They revved up some of their schematics, so they're to be given some credit as well. I thought Vance had an awesome plan. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that. That's a component of being a good professional, tipping the cap when it's deserved.

So it was multiple reasons why the second half unfolded the way that it did. What they did had something to do with it certainly.

Q. As far as the run game goes, sample size is small, what have you liked about your run game so far and what where do you think it can get better?

MIKE TOMLIN: That was appropriate given the time of the year and the environments that we've been in. I like what we done thus far, but we got a new agenda this week, a new challenge this week.

At the early stages of the year I'm always hesitant to paint with a broad brush and personality. Personality is revealed over time with circumstances and situations and how you perform and how you respond to certain circumstances.

So we've had a certain set of circumstances of variables at

the very beginning of the year that was very strong in terms of how we approach our business. The newness of all the people that I've mentioned, coupled with the environmental components and the lack of development that we all share in September, really dictated that we play a certain way.

But that is probably subject to change as we grow and as the venue changes. I'd be misleading you if I said what we've done to this point is us.

Q. With Justin, does he still view this as a chance to earn a starting slot now?

MIKE TOMLIN: You'd have to ask him that. I don't want to speak for him.

Q. Is the competition still?

MIKE TOMLIN: Again, I've stated where we are. At the beginning of week one, I said it was debatable. So we will stay status quo. Russell was in pole position.

My position regarding pecking order and the depth chart has not changed, guys, and it won't until the other guy gets healthy and then I won't speculate. I don't know how many ways I can tell you that.

Q. Do you pay attention to Justin Herbert's injury status?

MIKE TOMLIN: I have not to this point in the week. I will. Again, I don't speculate and read stuff on Tuesday. It's a waste of time. Participation or lack thereof is what gets my attention.

Q. (Indiscernible) how have you assessed his first two games this year?

MIKE TOMLIN: That is his life. That's what he signed up for. I've known him the majority of his life. He's living what he dreamed. He wants the big matchups. He's prepared himself for it.

There's challenges that come with it. I like the general spirit in which he addresses them. New week, new challenges for him. He's probably got another high pedigree talented guy to deal with this week.

But that's what he's running to, not away from. I just appreciate his approach and his attitude regarding it. We're going to continually work on technique and things of that nature. He's still a very young player, has room for growth in those areas. I expect him to.

Q. Have you had any professional interaction with Jim

Harbaugh?

MIKE TOMLIN: A lot over the years. This isn't his first rodeo in the National Football League. I've seen some of him over the years, certainly.

Q. You talk about the new additions to the defense. What type of impact has DeShon Elliott's versatility have?

MIKE TOMLIN: He's done a really nice job. He's new to us, but not unfamiliar to us. Saw a lot of tape on him when he was in the AFC North in Baltimore. Appreciate the things you mentioned. Proven to be very evident over the course of two weeks he's made quite a few plays, not to mention splash plays, tackles for losses, third down and one, the weighty plays that shape football games.

Excited for him, excited about continuing to utilize his talents as we get to know him more.

Q. Are you concerned about the lack of production at receiver?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm not.

Q. Your success on run defense, 17 yards for Williams.

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm sorry?

Q. What has gone into success with run defense, especially with Williams?

MIKE TOMLIN: They had a rookie quarterback. So we realized that they were going to allocate a lot of time and energy and prep towards minimizing his exposure to our defense, one dimensional circumstances. The number one way to do that is run the football. That was job one for us defensively last week, to attack the run so that they cannot protect or hide that inexperienced quarterback.

Q. How hard is it for you and the staff in a quarterback decision-making process to say no to him if he wants to go?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's not hard at all. He hasn't had medical clearance at this point. There's no judgment component of it.

In terms of getting to know him, it's a pleasure. You don't have the type of career that Russ has had without behaving in a certain way. I know that. Anybody of us in our business knows that. It's just cool to see that behavior, that professionalism, that approach to business that makes

his type of career happen.

It's good for young guys to see it, to glean from it, to learn from, but also to mimic it. It's just really good to have veterans around that have been to the mountaintop, if you will, professionally, seen a lot, experienced a lot. It's helpful on a lot of levels.

Q. Justin didn't run as much this week against the Broncos. Is that a function of their defense?

MIKE TOMLIN: Run as much as what?

Q. As he did in week one.

MIKE TOMLIN: It's a two-game sample. Keep watching.

Q. You mentioned a little bit last week, you expect Roman Wilson to get work this week?

MIKE TOMLIN: I do. We'll see where that leads, whether it leads to participation, how much participation. Yes, I was pleased with his progress last week. I'm excited to see where it leads us this week.

Q. How close was he to playing last week?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's irrelevant.

Q. (Question regarding the game ball.)

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, none of your businesses, respectfully. There's certain things that go on among teams that I don't talk about. Whether it gets out, how it gets out, is unimportant to me. I'm not overly guarded against.

It's just certain things as a leader I talk to the collective about that I have zero intentions of sharing with the larger public because it's about our collective, how we come together, how we appreciate and support one another.

I can't give you all the ingredients to the hot dog. You might not like it.

Q. As much weight as you tend to put on rookies in stadium in the pre-season before you allocated playing time, didn't get see much. What was it that he did in practice or classroom that really stood out?

MIKE TOMLIN: Actually I did. We were not passive about playing him in the pre-season when he was available. He played a lot. Then we had also practices against Buffalo. He's been in some elevated circumstances beyond the practices.

Some of the things that he's shown us has nothing to do with anything other than pedigree. He's really talented. That is very evident. So we play him.

Q. The Chargers are top of the league in personnel usage. Are you seeing a trend of teams going to bigger personnel packages?

MIKE TOMLIN: I've been preparing for two teams thus far. I'd be lying to you if I was talking to you about the trends and things of that nature. I know about Atlanta and I know about Denver. Getting to know about the L.A. Chargers.

Thanks, guys.

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