

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

Monday, January 27, 2025
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

President Art Rooney II

Weekday Press Conference



ART ROONEY II: Good afternoon. Just a quick few observations to get started.

Obviously a disappointing end to the season losing five in a row. Not what we expected, especially after getting off to a good start. We have a lot of work to do to improve going into next year.

After the coaching staff is in place, the priority will be the quarterback position, for sure. We have some decisions to make there. I thought Russ and Justin both showed promise in certain stretches during the season, and I think they're both capable of being starters in this league. So, we have decisions and they have decisions, too.

On the defensive side, it starts with stopping the run, and we didn't do that down the stretch. We need to figure out how we get stronger. Hopefully with a defensive front.

But, all in all, I still think we have strengths on this roster that are easy to build on. Hopefully the offensive line is a strength going into the future and on the defensive side. I think our linebacking corps is still a strength. We have areas that we can continue to build on. And look forward to getting to work here.

Q. How do you balance a 10-3 start and (indiscernible) in the building and you've seen these starts before, but you've also seen these collapses at the end of the season which have been repeated now four of the last five years. How do you balance that? What can you do?

ART ROONEY II: I think we have just have to keep building a strong roster. We got to play the cream of the crop there, that three-game stretch, the Christmas tournament, if you will. We played the best teams in the league and obviously you can see we're not there.

We need to do what we need to do to take the next step. Like I said, we still have strengths that we can build on to get there. And the quarterback position is a key, key piece

of the puzzle that needs to be addressed. That's priority number one.

Q. Last year at this time of the year you talked about needing to win playoff wins. You're another year into this now. Do you feel you're closer to that objective than you were?

ART ROONEY II: It's hard to say. After losing five in a row it's hard to say we're closer. I think the biggest piece of the puzzle, I keep saying this, we've got to address this quarterback position. And you look around and kind of see the teams that are at that next level, that's where they are, and they're there for that reason.

Q. Why does Mike remain the right guy to lead this team?

ART ROONEY II: When you look at how many games Mike has won in this league, you don't win that many games if you're not a good coach. And I know he's frustrated, like we all are, just not being able to take that next step.

But we still feel good about him being a leader and still think he has the strengths that he always had in terms of being able to lead a team.

The other side of the coin is you look at the fact that we have six, seven, eight teams a year that turn their coaches over. It's never a good strategy.

Q. You said "after the coaching staff was in place." Is it not now, or are there going to be some changes?

ART ROONEY II: I mean, I don't expect wholesale changes, but I think there are probably going to be a couple of changes.

Q. This time a year ago you said with Mike you knew he was the right guy because he could keep guys engaged for a full season and keep them fighting to make the playoffs last year. Given the five-game losing streak to end the season, do you still feel the message is getting through to the players in the locker room? Are they still staying engaged for the whole

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

season?

ART ROONEY II: It's a fair question after losing five in a row, but when I talked to the players, I think the players still want to play Mike. So I'm not concerned about his message or that kind of issue.

Q. What is the organization's plan to find that next quarterback? And could Justin or Russ be someone you could take the next step with?

ART ROONEY II: I think they're both capable quarterbacks. And my preference would be to sign one of them. So that will be the priority, and I think that gives us the best opportunity to move forward.

Obviously we'll be looking in the draft as well. We've got a whole quarterback room to fill. So there's jobs open in there. So I wouldn't be surprised if we look in the draft as well, either this year or next. And so that's going to be a priority.

Q. You imagine bringing both those guys, Russ and Justin?

ART ROONEY II: I wouldn't close the door, but I would say it's probably unlikely. I think both of them see themselves as starters. I don't know if they want to share the same job again next year. I would say most likely they'll wind up (indiscernible).

Q. Would it be more of a one-year experiment kind of like you had this season? Or whichever one you opted to bring back, would you look to have something more long term?

ART ROONEY II: I mean, it takes two to tango. So we'll see where it goes. I think my preference would probably to have something more than a one-year next time around, but we'll see what happens.

Q. When you replaced Ben, when he retired, you said mobility is great but you wanted a guy who could read a defense and throw the ball down the field. Do you still evaluate what you need in general terms to the position the same way, or is your view of the QB changing in terms of what you're looking for?

ART ROONEY II: No, it hasn't changed. I think the quarterback has to be able to read the defense and get the team in a play that is good against the defense he's looking at. No matter if he's mobile or not, that's what you've got to start with.

Q. You drafted a quarterback a couple years ago. I

would imagine you weren't necessary envisioning going back to the draft for a quarterback so soon. Are there things you learned in that process through evaluation and fit and development that could be applied, whether it's this year or next year?

ART ROONEY II: I think that obviously it's disappointing that Kenny didn't work out to be our long-term quarterback here. And I'm not sure there's a lot to be learned from that. Just have to look at the next opportunity and make sure we do a good job evaluating it the next time around.

Q. From your own perspective, as owner, do you see things that the Steelers can do in terms of advancing themselves, whether it's analytics, bigger coaching staff, something that's more overarching going into this offseason? Or is it going to be, let's just try harder?

ART ROONEY II: I wouldn't dismiss anything other than maybe a bigger coaching staff. I'm not sure that's the answer. Our coaching staff has grown and that's the size of staffs around the league. I don't think we're outliers in that regard.

On the analytic side, we have invested on that side and got more people in that department than we ever had, but we look at opportunities and technology changes. We'll have the opportunity to give ourselves better resources on that front. Certainly look at it.

Q. You say you guys aren't an outlier as far as coaching staff, but you do have the smallest coaching staff in the league, one of just --

ART ROONEY II: I don't know if that's --

Q. I ran the numbers -- one of just two teams that have fewer than 20 designated assistant coaches --

ART ROONEY II: We have 27.

Q. 27, okay. Why don't you think that expanding the coaching staff is the right direction?

ART ROONEY II: I don't see that holding us back. I don't think that's a problem.

Q. Did you see Justin in his first six games? Did you decide to go that way (indiscernible)?

ART ROONEY II: Obviously we had a winning record. We handled the situation. I think he's a young quarterback who wants to come in and learn and grow, and I think he did grow. He does have that mindset that he wants to get

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

better. So I think that makes you feel like you want to potentially work with him again in the future.

Q. When it comes to Russ and Justin, there's a 10-year gap. Do you take that into consideration thinking long term with these guys?

ART ROONEY II: Yeah, I think you have to take that into consideration. That's a factor.

Q. When you met with Mike after the season, what was the message to him?

ART ROONEY II: Disappointment. We've got to really figure out how we get better and what we need to do to get better. I think he understands -- look, Mike knows what the goal is here and what we're shooting for.

Q. Last year at this time you said you were impatient coming into, facing the playoffs. How would you describe your patience level now after the five-game losing streak to end the season?

ART ROONEY II: Still impatience. Disappointed the way we finished. So, it's hard to get over a five-game losing streak to end a season.

Q. Are there things that you would like to see Mike do differently, things that he needs to do differently? And does that include possibly staff changes?

ART ROONEY II: We talk about the staff all the time. So that's a process ongoing. Other things, probably not things that I'm ready to talk about in here. But we talk about lots of things in terms of how we try to (indiscernible).

Q. How would you evaluate Arthur Smith's first season with you guys?

ART ROONEY II: I think that it is hard to manage a quarterback room with quarterbacks with such different styles. And so I think going into next year I'd like to see us go in with a quarterback room that, whatever it is kind, you have two quarterbacks who can run the same system.

So I look at that as something we can build on and that Arthur can build on in the second year. Certainly saw some positives and things that we improved on. But at the end of the season didn't expect to see us finish that way.

Q. Over the last few years you guys have been on the bottom five in pass attempts. Philosophically, would you like to see your offense be more open to throw the ball more than it has recently?

ART ROONEY II: I certainly hope we continue to have a running game as one of our strengths. But bottom line is we have an offense that can take advantage of whatever the defense is giving us. And I think that's kind of the key.

Q. Talking about the run game, the value of the running back position has been debated. There's been some good running backs making waves in the league -- Saquon Barkley and Derrick Henry, who you guys saw this year. What's your evaluation of the running back market? And is there any regret in maybe not picking up Najee Harris as an option?

ART ROONEY II: Look, Najee is a good player, and we'll evaluate whether we can bring him back. He's going to have choices, too. So it's a position that I think is important to us. Obviously it's important to some other teams that have had success this year.

It's not as devalued as some might have thought. But we have a job opening in that room that we're going to have to fill. And whether it's Najee or somebody else going to be in the position.

Q. Where does improving the wide receiver room rank after quarterback? And what have you seen from George Pickens? Looks like he had some maturity issues, too.

ART ROONEY II: I think the wide receiver room is an area we've got to look at improving. But George is a very talented player who has room to grow. We'd like to see him grow and hopefully he realizes the potential that he has, but definitely room for growth there.

Q. You're not somebody who hibernates or hides from the public or fans or anything like that. Do you have a sense for how mad people are, how mad these fans are?

ART ROONEY II: My in-box has been pretty full.

Q. I bet it has (laughter).

ART ROONEY II: I have a sense. And I share the frustration. It's very disappointing. I understand why, I understand why people are mad. All I can say is actions speak louder than words, and we've got to be better.

Q. (Indiscernible) coaching staff?

ART ROONEY II: I didn't say that. I said a big chunk of the staff --

Q. Those are the ones that are under --

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

ART ROONEY II: Yes.

Q. Are any of those ones you consider would have to change?

ART ROONEY II: That's still the process we're going through.

Q. You were asked some questions about philosophically what you want your offense to look like. There's only two teams playing right now. When you look at it, do you say, the Philadelphia Eagles are one of the most run-heavy teams; you can still win with an offense that runs the ball a lot? Or do you look at it and say, Patrick Mahomes is on the other side, and no one can beat him; we need to find a quarterback who can stand toe to toe?

ART ROONEY II: It's interesting we have two teams in the Super Bowl with such different styles. It shows you can win with more than one approach. I think bottom line is you've got to try to win with the talent you have and the ability. And they have two different kinds of talent in their building. So it will be an interesting game.

We've got to build on the strengths that we can put together in our room. And I still think that running the ball is a route to success, particularly when you're playing without a roof and outside, things like that.

Q. Going back to the Baltimore game, results aside, what was your perception of the defense and how it was playing, the engagement level, the fight in the defense in that game?

ART ROONEY II: Well, I mean, it wasn't good enough, let's say that. It wasn't good enough. I think that we were a team that was coming off four losses in a row and we may have had some confidence problems going into that game. I don't know for sure.

But it was not a great performance. Like I said, hard to overcome that, but we will.

Q. You mentioned, you were asked about George and you said there were some growth opportunities there. But the list of guys that have sort of fit that mold in that room going back 10 years, you've had a guy in there that's generated off-the-field stuff or gets fined for on-the-field stuff. Do you have to re-evaluate -- while being productive players -- do you have to re-evaluate how you evaluate that position?

ART ROONEY II: I think every team seems to have one or

two guys in that room that you have to manage them correctly. I still think George has enough talent that we've got to try to work and see if we can get him to reach his -- fulfill the talent that he really has. Who knows if we can get there. We'll see.

But when you have guys that are as talented as some of the guys you're probably thinking of, you try to work with them and have them help you be successful.

Q. Have you had any thoughts about, he's entering last year his rookie year, have you had talks towards whether you're going to extend him?

ART ROONEY II: No, we haven't gotten into talking about his contract yet.

Q. We talked a lot about offensive philosophies. When you look at defensive philosophies, are there things big picture-wise that maybe need to change defensively, whether that's moving T.J. around, more exotic blitzes, things like that, to maybe be able to stop some of these high-powered offenses that are popping up around the league?

ART ROONEY II: I mean, look, I'm not a defensive coach so I can't go into detail on our defensive schemes.

I would just say that if you're going to stop the run, you've got to be disciplined in your gaps and sometimes we weren't. I'm not sure why. So there's things like that I think we have to look at. And I'm sure the coaching staff will be looking at that.

Q. Your brother recently went on a broadcast and made some news. Is that something the organization feels is the hope, (indiscernible)?

ART ROONEY II: You know, Jim speaks for himself, and I'm happy that he's doing good selling his book.

Q. You invested heavily in defense last several years, you still haven't gotten -- maybe need to reposition and maybe address the offense more at the expense of the defense, or are you comfortable where you're spending?

ART ROONEY II: Look, as we said, we have a position in the running back room we're going to have to address. I think we have positions in the wide receiver room we're going to have to address. So I hope that we don't do that at the expense of the defense, but we do have positions we have to address on that side of the ball, for sure.

Q. This time a year ago you were assessing the



... when all is said, we're done.®

facilities of the stadium, looking at different improvements that might need to be made. What kind of conclusions did you draw from that and kind of where are things in terms of stadium upgrades or practice facility upgrades?

ART ROONEY II: We're still looking at both and need to continue to look at that and come to some conclusions. Not quite there yet in terms of definite conclusions on anything. But we spent a lot of money on consultants.

Q. T.J. Watts said after the season that he wants to be a part of the solution. He has one year left on his contract. Is an extension a priority for him this offseason?

ART ROONEY II: I think that's something we want to look at this offseason. T.J. has been one of the foundations of the defense for quite a number of years now. And I certainly hope we can have T.J. here for the future beyond this year.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports