

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Weekday Press Conference



where I am comfortable in and take it from there.

Q. As a rookie, you played on the outside, in '23 you played the one slot, and then last year you were back on the outside a lot. What's the biggest thing you've learned in switching so much in the second year?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: I would say -- you know, it's a different dynamic when you're playing inside corner because you got a different road than what it is outside. Outside you focus primarily just on that receiver on that side because it's going to technically turn to man after awhile. With nickel, you got run scheme, you got different stunts that you got to go over with the D-line, zone coverage, you got drop into. So that's just about it, for real.

Q. Did any of the guys reach out to you?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Beanie Bishop, but we in the same agency, so we connected.

Q. You also bring a lot of special teams experience. Is that something you take pride in?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Yeah, I take pride in special teams, obviously, because that's what got me here today. With the Jets, I was able to play special teams and make myself available on game days just in case any guys got hurt. If any did, I'd take advantage of the opportunity.

Q. A few years ago, did you interaction with Mike Tomlin?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: This will be my first time talking to him.

Q. What was it like to have Aaron Rodgers as a teammate last year and where do you think that's going?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: (Laughing.) Man, it's cool. It was cool. I couldn't really -- when he first got there, I couldn't really feel him out, but after awhile he kind of -- we kind of gravitated towards each other, and practices, he started to try to attack me, but it was for the betterment of me. I will say having him around, it did make me a better football

Q. Brandin, what did they tell you why they signed you and what your role might be here in Pittsburgh?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: I'm going to come in, obviously try to compete for a starting spot. That's where I see myself as, that's where I always see myself as since I came to the league. I'm glad they took the chance on me to sign me. I'm just here ready to ball, compete.

Q. Did you know anything about Pittsburgh before they signed you? Did you know anything about Joey Porter or any of those things?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I did my research. I used to always watch the Steelers growing up. I used to be a Cowboys fan as a child, so this was one of them teams that you had to watch. But, yeah, no, I just love the atmosphere here, like the history behind it and, you know, just ready to be great here.

Q. What else did you find out from your research? Was that the main thing or what else did you notice about the Steelers when you were scouting them?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Man, just over the past years, just how their defense operates, just paying attention to the D-line. I heard the D-line really get after it. D-line for a DB, as you know, that's our biggest blessing, so if they eat, we eat.

Q. You played inside and outside corner. Do you see one of those as a better spot for you at this point in your career and have they told you anything about how they plan to use you?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: I'm versatile, as you just said, but right now, it's just trying to see where I could fit in, see



player.

Q. Now that you're here, are you trying to recruit him to come join you?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Hell, yeah. I told his ass, Come on.

Q. What gravitated to you personality-wise with him?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Oh, because I'm more of a, you know, laid back type of guy, try to just get a feel for everybody. He just, you know, started pushing his way towards me and making jokes, poking at me and stuff. Then after awhile, we started talking, and I used to have a little hairdo thing that I would do. He would look at me, if his hair was on the right side, he's mad. If it's on the left side, he's happy. If it's in the middle, you don't know what you might get. So, yeah, he was cool.

Q. How did he play last year, do you think?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: I think he played good, especially towards the end of the season. I wish the outcome was a little better, but towards the end of the season he started to really wake up.

Q. This will be your first time meeting Mike Tomlin. What have you heard about him as a coach and what are you looking forward to most about working with him?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Old-school guy, got a lot of grit, a competitor, like, let the best guys play. That's my biggest thing, is just let the best guys play, and we're all going to eat together.

Q. (Question about competing for the same job.)

BRANDIN ECHOLS: No, we ain't got into all that. That's not what I feel is necessary right now. Right now, I just feel like it's necessary to just try to find my -- where I can fit in at.

Q. What's your understanding of why the Jets never extended your contract?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: That's outside of what my knowledge. I wouldn't know. There wasn't no conversation back and forth trying to get me to come back. But obviously, Pittsburgh gave me a better offer and a better deal and that's what I rode with.

Q. Between inside and outside, which one do you feel is your stronger suit or which one is more comfortable for you?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: I'm more comfortable outside, but playing slot in 2023, I did start getting comfortable, started liking that a lot. But I'm more of an outside corner. I feel comfortable outside.

Q. Do you remember anything that got -- left an impression on you preparing to play the Steelers last year or actually playing in that game?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Yeah, just getting ready for George Pickens. That's all I was really worried about, just getting ready for him because I know the type of guy he is and what he brings to the team, what he brings to the field, so I was just trying to prepare myself for that.

Q. Are you looking forward to going up against him in training camp and in practice?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Hell yeah. Hell yeah. Yeah.

Q. What do you know about the way the Steelers play defense?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: They get after it and that's exactly how I play. Like, I like to run to the ball, I like to hit. When the ball in the sky, I like to go get it. We got that on the side of the defense with Pittsburgh with the D-line, the linebackers, the secondary. So just coming into this, I plan on being a major contributor to the defense too.

Q. As a corner, do you like to tackle? They value tackling here. Do you like that part of the game?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Yeah, it wakes me up. Like, it really gets me going. For me, I got to get that first tackle out of the way beginning of the game just to get me going for real. After that, you know, ain't no telling what might happen next.

Q. Three interceptions over the past two years for you. Where does that ball production come from for you? How did you develop it? Is that something that has been communicated to you by anyone?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: That comes from, obviously, film study, and I'm an instinctual player. I try to make sure everything I do is instinctual. I don't like to try to think too much. A lot of plays that I made since being in the league, I couldn't tell that you moment what happened, but I could tell you afterwards what happened because I just -- I rely on my instincts and for me to just go get the ball.

Q. You're from Memphis. There's a ton of Memphis guys around here --



BRANDIN ECHOLS: Mississippi.

Q. Memphis area. Sorry.

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Yeah.

Q. Those from the area and then a bunch from Memphis. What do you think about that place that produces good football players?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: I feel like down where I'm at the exposure isn't as wide as it is in other areas, so I feel like we get missed out upon sometimes. But it's starting to change a little bit. You're starting to see more guys from our area come into the league, so that's a plus for me.

Q. Did you know Calvin from high school?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: I knew about him. I didn't know him, but I knew -- I did know D.K. I played D.K. Metcalf in high school.

Q. Was he that size in high school?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: Man, he was a handful, I will say that. (Laughing.)

Q. How is playing against D.K. and playing against George? Because you played against George last year, right?

BRANDIN ECHOLS: The difference? I mean, I couldn't really tell you because it was in high school. I didn't really play defense in high school. I was an offensive player in high school. Playing against George, you know, George, he's tall, long, relentless attitude. You don't know what you might get from him sometimes. You got to be ready to make sure you're ready to ball with him, though.

(Next player.)

Q. Do you see yourself as an inside linebacker? Outside linebacker? Both?

MALIK HARRISON: Yeah, anywhere they see me as. I can play both. I showed that in Baltimore. So either way I'm fine with anything. I'm fine with anything to make the team better.

Q. Were you one of the ones that thought Patrick Queen was a traitor last year?

MALIK HARRISON: No, no, no.

Q. Can you talk about the whole going from there to here thing?

MALIK HARRISON: No, I definitely did. I was happy for Queen. We came in together, so that's my brother. So I was just happy for him to just get what he deserves. So, yeah, I never said he was a traitor or nothing. That's my guy.

Q. Did you have to think twice about doing this?

MALIK HARRISON: Oh, you know, no, not really. Not really, but there's no disrespect to Baltimore. I love Baltimore. The five years that I was there, I had a great time, but I'm turning a new chapter here and I'm with the Steelers.

Q. Obviously you're focused on the Steelers offense. What did you see from the Steelers' defense that you felt would make it a good fit for you?

MALIK HARRISON: Just the style of play. Everybody's aggressive over there. I think I just fit in with that, just the way that I play. Obviously, I'm next to PQ, so be comfortable with that.

Q. Did you talk to PQ about the situation here --

MALIK HARRISON: Definitely.

Q. -- before you made a decision?

MALIK HARRISON: Definitely. Once it settled that Pittsburgh was coming for me, I definitely hit him up. He probably was on the boat at that time. But I hit him up. We talked a little bit, and when I made my decision, total.

Q. Did you have any kind of relationship with Mike Tomlin before this process? Had you crossed paths with him in the draft at all?

MALIK HARRISON: Definitely did here and there. It wasn't a big, but definitely -- especially when he came to -- what is it? Ohio State for pro day. So got to see him a lot. And then from Columbus, you know. So there's a lot of Steeler fans out there and I used to watch the games when I was younger.

Q. What were your impressions of him and what's it like to now get to be coached by him?

MALIK HARRISON: Just a great guy, a genuine guy. I just liked the way that -- his coaching style is and, like I said, just growing up just watching it, it has always been a dream to come here too.

Q. Did you grow up a Steelers fan?

MALIK HARRISON: I did not. I did not grow up no fans of any NFL teams. I was more of a player person.

Q. This is a pretty star-studded linebacker room. What's it going to be like for you to work with all the players on the team?

MALIK HARRISON: I'm excited to work with them, especially, T.J. Watt. He's a great guy, great player. PQ, like I said, we came in together, so that's my guy.

Q. Were you mostly edge in just situations or was it game to game?

MALIK HARRISON: I think it was game to game. It was more game to game, but throughout the game, you can see me play Mike, Will, Sam, and some DM. So anywhere that they put me, that's where I was playing.

Q. Did you say mostly inside, though?

MALIK HARRISON: Mostly inside and Sam backer, yeah.

Q. You said you were a player guy. Who were some of the players that you liked watching or wanted to model your game after?

MALIK HARRISON: Definitely Shazier. Being an Ohio State guy, definitely him. And then Le'Veon, he's from Columbus, so got to watch him growing up. And then Cam Heyward. He's already here, so I'm excited to play, yeah.

Q. They like to have their guys on the outside at least drop into coverage and play the run well. How do you think that fits into your game?

MALIK HARRISON: That's what I was doing back in Baltimore. Sometimes I will set the edge or blitz or drop-in coverage, so it's nothing that I'm unusual with.

Q. You mentioned that you model or watched Jay Shazier. Have you had a chance to talk to him much and have you talked to him about this opportunity?

MALIK HARRISON: No, I haven't talked to him yet, but when I was in college, I definitely connected with him a couple times.

Q. You have extensive experience playing on special teams. How much of what you do on special teams is part of the conversation about what they want you to do here?

MALIK HARRISON: Special teams, that's always been my heart. That's where I started off at, even at Ohio State. Ohio State, if you don't play special teams, you're not going to play at all. So I take pride in special teams, so I'll be back doing that again.

Q. Danny Smith is a very popular special teams coach, especially around these parts. Did you know anything about him and just the culture that he's set?

MALIK HARRISON: Definitely in Baltimore because Coach Horton, he played for him, so I've definitely got some insight about Danny. But great coach, always competitive. I see him on the sidelines when I was on the other way. He will talk sometimes, but I can tell that he's very passionate about this, and I can't wait to play for him.

Q. What do you think makes the Steelers-Ravens rivalry so special and what are you looking forward to about being on the other side of it?

MALIK HARRISON: I think the competitiveness. I think being on the other side, you know, during that week it's just different. I feel like over here it's going to be even more different, just because I don't know what it is. But I'm pretty sure it's just like the Ohio State and Michigan rivalry.

Q. At the same time what's your thoughts on being on the other side of Lamar Jackson?

MALIK HARRISON: Oh, man, he surprised me every day. He'd do things that you never -- you don't think that a person can do. So great guy, been my guy since day one. He knew my name when I first came in. I'm like, man, how you know me? (Laughing.) So yeah.

Q. On that question, obviously, you were there just a couple months ago and the four previous seasons. How much are you looking forward to trying to be part of this defense stopping that run game with Derrick Henry with Lamar twice or even three times this season?

MALIK HARRISON: Going against them in practice every day you can't do too much because you don't want to mess with church money. But now me being on the other side, I can really just unleash and just dominate how I know I can do.

Q. Did they have conversations with you here about, Hey, this is what -- you know, we're bringing you in? Because they always talk about they draft guys to beat the Ravens, the Ravens draft guys to beat Steelers. Did they tell you that?



MALIK HARRISON: I'm pretty sure that's, you know, one of the main reasons why I'm here. I played against D Ham maybe my first two years, so it's nothing new to me. Can't wait for it. It's a challenge, but I'm up for it.

Q. Is there much talk about, among the free agents, the new guys coming to a new team and not really sure where the quarterback situation stands or who might end up being this team's quarterback?

MALIK HARRISON: I haven't really talked about that yet. I'm still in an ultimate high, even signing here. But I'm excited to be here. I can't wait.

(Next player.)

Q. What was it about Pittsburgh that you felt like this was the right fit?

KENNY GAINWELL: I just felt like it was right team to come to. I love what Coach Mike Tomlin do here and that running back room it's a pretty stout room, so I want it bring my talents into that room and give them all I can.

Q. There's been comparisons with you and Jaylen. How well do you know Jaylen? Do you feel like you guys are very similar in styles?

KENNY GAINWELL: I don't know Jaylen as well, but I'm pretty sure I'll get to know him really well this year. But our play style can be similar, our play style can be different. It don't matter. It's just as long as we're getting a win on Sunday and bringing that attitude.

Q. How do you see the job being shared?

KENNY GAINWELL: I don't know yet. I'm just now getting here. It's my first day in. I'm pretty sure it's going to go however way they want it to, but I'm going to bring my all each and every day.

Q. What do you know about Arthur Smith and have you had a chance to talk with him yet or know what type of offense he likes to run and how well you fit?

KENNY GAINWELL: I haven't got a chance to talk to him yet, but I'm pretty sure I will here soon. I know that he loves a two-back system and that's something that I've been doing for the last four years in Philly. So I'm kind of well with that, and I'm kind of well with taking on a role, whatever role that is that it come to and I'll embrace it.

Q. Bittersweet leaving Philadelphia? Obviously a lot of good times there and winning a Super Bowl. How

tough was it to have to turn the page?

KENNY GAINWELL: It was bittersweet, but life goes on. So I love those guys, but at the end of the day, a man got to be a man and step up and do what he got to do on the next level and the next part of his life.

Q. How much do you think your performance against the Steelers in the game that you played against them this past year opened their eyes and what do you remember about that game?

KENNY GAINWELL: I'm pretty sure it did open their eyes to interest in me. But I went into that game ready to ball out, and I feel like I'm going to bring that same energy here each and every day and especially on Sunday, so they're going to get the same energy from me.

Q. What was it about that game and that matchup that you said you went into it ready to ball out? Was there something that made you want to elevate even more or what was it that got you juiced up for that game?

KENNY GAINWELL: I had got more opportunities that game and when you get more opportunities, you show more. So I basically just went out and did exactly what I do each and every day when I practice, so it just showed up on that game.

Q. Given more opportunity, do you think you can make those kind of open-field moves?

KENNY GAINWELL: No doubt. No doubt about that, for sure.

Q. There's been a lot of talk about the Steelers following the Eagles model. How much have you paid attention to what they have done? They have drafted offensive linemen back-to-back first-round picks, second-round centers. Was that something that was appealing to you?

KENNY GAINWELL: The offensive line is something that I feel is a great part of this thing that's going on, and if they're trying to follow something, it is what it is, but I'm pretty sure Coach Mike Tomlin wants more wins and having a stout frontline and great backs, that's what's going to bring more W's. I love the offensive linemen. I love when the big guys get dirty and nasty up front, so that's what I love and, hey, I can't wait to get a chance to talk to those guys.

Q. You average over 25 yards per kick return. You have a lot of experience doing that. How much of that experience is something that the Steelers talked about



with you when you guys were talking about coming here?

KENNY GAINWELL: Not too much, but that's something that I've been doing for the last year, year and a half. But bringing that access into this game and to this building is going to be something good. I'm pretty sure that I'll bring a next-level type of step in that role and more better on special teams, so I'm ready to embrace that role and do what I can.

Q. Do you think winning the Super Bowl changed you at all?

KENNY GAINWELL: I mean, I still, it's still fresh, I feel like the Super Bowl win was something great and it's still fresh on my mind. It just happened like a couple weeks ago, so man, I can't say too much about it, because I can't even get out the emotions I want to even when I'm talking to my family. So it was a great game, but I'm excited about it.

Q. Do you think there's anything that allows you guys to win besides having good players?

KENNY GAINWELL: Us sticking together, us being together. We stuck together a lot. We talked a lot as players with each other. So I'm pretty sure that's what stood out a lot to help us get that win and, yeah.

Q. Do you have any apprehension signing a free agent deal with a team where the quarterback situation's kind of up in the air and you don't necessarily know who is going to be handing the ball off to you or throwing it to you?

KENNY GAINWELL: I don't know. I mean, like I said, it's my first day here, so hopefully we find the greatest quarterback out there that we can, and hopefully he come in and do exactly what we need to do to get more wins.

Q. With the Eagles, they had Saquon and other featured backs, how did you your role change or did it change or were you always trying to do the same thing?

KENNY GAINWELL: My role kind of always its same. I kind of had a different role in 2023, but my role was always the same, to be a third-down back to go in there and pick up blitzes and go in there and pick up a first down if I need to. But my role was always the same and I embraced it and hopefully my role can grow larger now and I'm willing to take the next step.

Q. Do you prefer Kenneth or Kenny?

KENNY GAINWELL: It really don't matter. Kenny. Kenny G. You want to call me Kenny G? You got it, baby.

Q. The assistant general manager here, Andy Weidl, I'm sure he's had his eye on you a long time. Do you think he was instrumental in bringing you here and targeting you in free agency now that he's here?

KENNY GAINWELL: I'm pretty sure he was. And that game, that game really, I guess, put their eyes on me even more, but Andy is a great guy, I know they got me in 2021, I'm pretty sure that was just a, we want to keep our eye on Kenny, and just, if we get an opportunity, we can. So I mean, we ended up here, so I guess it was right.

Q. How well do you know Calvin and how many other guys on this team do you know from various stops?

KENNY GAINWELL: I've been on Calvin since 2018 when I first got to Memphis. I played with him in 2019, 2020 on spring ball and I know Isaac, the left guard, played with him at Philly for two years before he came here. I don't know too many other guys, but I'm pretty sure I'll get to know those guys soon.

Q. When you were looking for teams what was it about this scheme-wise of what the Steelers like to do that you thought, Hey, I can heighten what they do, I can help?

KENNY GAINWELL: I'm pretty sure it was the opportunity role. Me having more of an opportunity to get out in space and make a move or run more routes. And, you know, we love to run the ball here, so get to run the ball a little bit more and just the opportunity.

Q. Pass protection and are you familiar with Jaylon Moore and -- he likes that.

KENNY GAINWELL: Yeah, he like it. I love it. I love it. I can't wait to get in his ear and see what he, you know, some techniques that he have and some that I can add to my game and some things that I can add to his game and make each other better. I can't wait to get the opportunity to talk to them.

Q. What do you love about it?

KENNY GAINWELL: I love how physical he is.

Q. No, I mean the blitz pick up.

KENNY GAINWELL: Blitz pick up? I mean, hey, if I can protect the quarterback, then we can win more.

Q. When you talk about techniques that you pick up, you want to get from Jaylen. What did you learn playing with Saquon last year, what kind of things did you pick up from him?

KENNY GAINWELL: I picked up a lot. He's one of those guys that one -- I can say he's one of those guys that always taking care of his body. Everybody see his legs and be like, Oh! Quads and calves, you can just tell he take care of his body. But that's one thing I picked up from him. He's one of those guys that's always in the building, he's a learn-first guy before he react. So that's just something I picked up from him. And even from the previous guys that were there too, like D'Andre Swift and Miles Sanders, those guys, that was guys that I learned from too that keep adding on to my game and I just keep getting better and better from those guys.

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