

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Omar Khan

Mike Tomlin

Draft Day Press Conference



OMAR KHAN: Thanks for still being here. Can't say enough about how the draft went for us. Really feel like we're a better football team today than we were before the draft started on Thursday. We filled several needs, and I think the term was used a couple days ago about "Steelers DNA," and I think when you guys get to know these guys, you'll realize these guys have Steelers DNA.

But again, I'm excited, can't say enough, and I just want to send a quick shout-out to everybody that was involved from our scouts, our coaches and the support staff here because there's a lot that goes into this and things went really well for us this weekend and that's a credit to them and everything they do for us.

Q. Big emphasis on fixing the defensive front and getting some big-bodied guys?

MIKE TOMLIN: Yeah, I would certainly agree with that, but it goes beyond the defensive front. We wanted to retool physicality in all areas, including in that discussion is the use of the second-round pick to acquire DK Metcalf, although he's a receiver, I think he fits the bill in terms of physicality and size.

That definitely was an agenda of ours this weekend.

Q. Mike, when did you start to like Will Howard and what did he show you down the stretch of the Playoffs?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think like a lot of people, how he responded to that adversity at the end of their regular season and the leadership and play making that he displayed throughout the Playoffs was really attractive. It's really what NFL football is about. There's going to be some adversity. How you respond to it defines you and your football team particularly from the quarterback position.

Q. How about the way Jack Sawyer responded to that, as well, being kind of part B to that team, I guess, and the leader of that team?

MIKE TOMLIN: Love Jack Sawyer. It's easy to love not only in terms of his resume but his relationship with the game, his approach to football business, how he's viewed and received by his teammates. As Omar mentioned, a lot of these guys represent Steeler DNA, and I think that's really indicative of Jack Sawyer.

Q. Was drafting Carson Bruener atypical at all?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, great story, obviously, for he and his family, but as I told him when we had him on the phone, we were on the phone with him because of the merits of his resume and the things that he did at UW. Over 100 tackles this year as a starting inside linebacker, displaying great instincts, and in 22 and 23 he had double-digit special teams tackles for his football team. It is a worthy resume.

It's just an awesome side note that his father is a Steeler and got drafted by this organization, I think, 30 years ago.

Q. When you have a player like Sawyer where outside linebacker was not a desperate need for you but you felt like he was a really good player for the slot, how do you balance those things and where do you decide it's okay to pull the trigger on a guy who you think is talented even if it's not a huge need?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, I think you said it based on how we had him graded, we spent a lot of time with him, he just fits here, and it made sense. But we had a really good grade on him, and it was hard to pass up at that point.

Q. You dedicated significant free agent assets towards the secondary, went back to the secondary late with Kent from Central Michigan. How do you feel about the depth at outside corner?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, he has a Swiss Army Knife skill set. He's capable of playing inside and out. He also added to his resume this year by proving to be a very capable punt returner, and I think that's things that are attractive to



you later in the draft, a guy that adds versatility in his game. So we're excited about putting him in the mix.

Q. You went really heavy on Big Ten products. What is it about the brand of football that they play the style that fits with this organization?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know if that was an agenda. I just think there's a lot of teams in the Big Ten now, just like there's a lot of teams in the SEC. How many teams are there in the Big Ten?

Q. A lot more than 10.

MIKE TOMLIN: So that's probably the safe assumption there.

Q. How does Kaleb Johnson fit with what you want to do in your offense?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, just like I was talking about a physicality and big man agenda, this is a high-volume capable runner who was the center of his offense, a lot of NFL Sunday-like runs, if you will, meaning he did it from the home position or the pistol position into a lot of loaded boxes. There wasn't a lot of guesswork or Saturday-like holes on his tape, and that made the evaluation a fun one and the projection an easy one.

Q. Sticking with just running back, you have a couple 5'8", 5'9" guys in Jaylen Warren and Kenny Gainwell. Was his size, 6'1", 225 pounds, something that you wanted to round out that room?

MIKE TOMLIN: Less concerned about the measurables and more concerned about the play style and the resume, and certainly he's a guy that's capable of high-volume carries.

Q. When you talk about "Steeler DNA," what are you talking about?

OMAR KHAN: I remember when I got this job, I talked about what it means to be a Steeler, and I could be up here for three days talking about it. I think when you're in this for as long as we are, you just sort of know, and that's why the process of getting out there and getting to know the guys is so important to us. We spend a lot of time on the road. We spend a lot of time meeting with guys at the combine. It goes more than -- it's more than just about who they are as a player. It's who they are as a person, too.

We get to know them on the road and bring them here and the combine is just -- you just sort of know when you're in

this. You get a feel for those guys.

There's times we leave these dinners or these meetings, we're like, not sure. But there's sometimes where you're like, that guy, he's one of us. You just sort of know. I'm not really answering your question there, but...

Q. With Will Howard, what kind of value do you feel like you got being able to select him in the sixth?

OMAR KHAN: You know what, he's a national champion and that says a lot about him. Just feel really good about knowing where we got him, just that we got the player here.

Q. Did you expect the quarterback board to shake out the way it did going into this draft?

OMAR KHAN: You never really know. I think we talked about the other day, we're guessing like everyone else. You just don't know, and it just sort of fell that way.

Q. As you were sitting there waiting on Day 2, I'm sure Kaleb Johnson had to be high on your list. At any moment did you feel pressure to make a move to go get him?

OMAR KHAN: You know, I think -- let's just go back. It feels like it was a week ago. But we feel there's some calls just like we do every round, but it just felt like it was coming to us the right way. There hadn't been that run on the running backs, and it was a deep position, and we were excited that we were able to get him.

Q. Omar, how do you see Yahya Black fitting into the defense?

MIKE TOMLIN: Like I've been saying throughout the process, he's a big chassis, okay. There's F150s. He's like an F350. He's a big man and really stout against the run. You can always use a skill set like that certainly.

Q. Omar, as draft preparation really ramped up in March and you got ready for free agency, what made you decide to go as heavy and invest in DK, invest in Slay, invest in Eckels at those positions, knowing by that point you were looking at the draft?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, that's a good question. When you start the process, you hope that it's going to work out perfectly for you the way you want it. It just doesn't happen. There's a lot of variables that cause you to have to adjust and you have to be flexible and you have to be light on your feet and that's sort of how that process goes. You'd love to get X, Y and Z and sometimes you do,



sometimes you don't. The way it worked out this year, it really worked good for us. DK when we had the opportunity to trade for DK, we were all in on that, and we felt it was important, just excited to have him here. Just sort of happens that way.

Q. Did it sort of dovetail the way the pool was, as well?

MIKE TOMLIN: When free agency hit, we had had enough time to analyze the draft pool and we recognized that maybe those were probably good locations to invest in terms of veteran NFL guys and so that's why we did it.

Q. Mike, Caleb's top speed isn't great, but he was very explosive in college. What traits about him to be so explosive despite not having great top speed?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, we didn't question his speed whatsoever watching the video. Oftentimes that's the case. You can watch video and be really excited about someone's speed or you can go to the combine and get excited by their combine 40 time. His speed was not in question on video. He broke a lot of long runs in the Big Ten, as we talked about earlier, and so he's just a very talented young guy, but also at the same time, he's a third-year junior, and it's just exciting to be a part of his continued growth process.

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