

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

T.J. WATT

Draft Day Press Conference



Q. T.J., was it important for you to get the deal done before training camp? Did it kind of come together a little quicker than maybe you thought?

T.J. WATT: I just wanted the deal to get done, and obviously I'm happy it got done before training camp, just to be able to be here, to eliminate any potential distraction and just worry about football. I'm just excited. I'm really excited to be here. I'm excited to show the fans what we have to offer here this training camp and get the ball rolling.

Q. What do you have to show the fans?

T.J. WATT: I'm just excited about this new team. I mean, there are so many new faces, as you guys all know, as the fans know, but the goal always remains the same, and it's a new year; it's a fresh start for everybody across the league. Everybody looks good on paper this time of year, but it's all about what we do over the next week, next couple weeks here in preparation.

Q. What is it you like about this team?

T.J. WATT: I mean, all the new faces. I wasn't here in the summer obviously, so there's going to be a lot of people to get to know and talk to, but a lot of play makers, a lot of young guys that are going to going into their second and third year as well, just being more and more familiar with the system, some coaches coming back, some new coaches also, and it's just fun. It's a fun time of year. It really is, to be back here in the Latrobe.

We're going to go to Sharky's at some point, I'm sure, with the guys and get some wings like we always do, all the traditions that makes this place special and hopefully leads to a successful season for us.

Q. Speaking of which, do you pick up the check at Sharky's?

T.J. WATT: Yeah. I'll be picking up the check for quite

some time, I'm sure. I got no problem doing that.

Q. Your brother J.J. posted something, he said there should never be a time when you guys are at dinner together and you don't pick up the check.

T.J. WATT: I mean, we've always had really good fun banter. J.J. has covered the check for a lot of my life. So I have no problem repaying the favor, but he's done pretty damn well for himself, too.

Q. What went into the decision to stay home during the spring as opposed to in '21 where you kind of held?

T.J. WATT: Yeah, in the spring when it was 2021, I think I only came for the three days. So you kind of fly in, you do work off to the side and you fly back home anyways. So it was just kind of staying in my routine.

The guys here have been really understanding of how I train back home, and they understand that I'm working; I'm not just sitting on the couch the whole time, and I always come prepared. So I think you guys will see throughout the week, first week back, yeah, I've been away, but I've been training as hard as I possibly can like I do each and every year, so I come in prepared.

Q. Were you trying to send a message to Omar and those guys by not coming in those three days?

T.J. WATT: I mean there's definitely more that goes to a lot of things when it comes to a contract, but I think it was more so just being prepared as best I possibly could as opposed to flying in, doing stuff on the side, potentially being even more of a distraction. And, like I said, I'm glad the deal got done. I'm super excited to move forward.

Q. Speaking of the messages, you posted on your Instagram story a peace sign during the off season. Was that a particular message to anyone? Did you just feel like posting the picture at that point? What was kind of behind that?

T.J. WATT: Sometimes it's just fun to have fun with the narratives out there because obviously I am very in tune

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with what's going on in negotiations and how things are going, and it's fun to see what you guys are all writing, thinking that things are one way, even though they're completely a different way. So sometimes it's fun, especially when it's early in the off season, to kind of throw something out there and see what happens. It stirred things up a lot more than I ever thought it could.

Q. Did it get things going faster? Did it work to your advantage in negotiations or did it just stir stuff up for us?

T.J. WATT: I don't know. That's the great thing about negotiations. You never know what works. I'm sure both sides have things that they've done and that they used as tools and chess pieces per se throughout the process, but I'm sure you'll never know what worked and what didn't.

Q. Alex just made mention of this when we spoke with him, but summer training camp will be used to maybe coming up, as he said, different looks for the pass rush this year. I know you've been in contract discussion mode, but have there been any discussions about how you might move around a little bit more this year on the field? I know you alluded to that with us during your exit interview.

T.J. WATT: That's something that this time of year is perfect for us, to move around, to get comfortable. It's not about winning every single rep and having to be on the left side and having to get everything mastered on the left side. It's about trying new things and moving around, and I'm sure you guys will see a good amount of that. And we just have so much depth, especially at the outside linebacker position with Herb, too, who's a more than capable pass rusher. So I'm sure we'll have some cool packages and some new stuff for you guys to see.

Q. What can you guys do to prevent these late-season letdowns we've kind of had over the last, say, four or five years? Anything in particular you can do?

T.J. WATT: I think it's staying healthy is a huge thing. I think it's rotating more. I think it's staying fresh. I think it's the way we approach practice, the way we approach everything. I think everything you do is contagious in one way or another. So I'm just trying to be the best teammate I can be day in and day out, be as consistent as possible, and as the stretch goes on, you have to find ways to stay fresh and to modify, if you need to. And those are all conversations that we're going to have this time of year to make sure that we're able to make that push when we need to.

Q. Did you sense any problems in that Baltimore game

beyond scheme or execution? You guys were pretty -- the team got pretty hard on the broadcast for effort and pushback and some of the intangible stuff.

T.J. WATT: I mean, I'm not going to continue to look back. I'm excited to be here this year and move forward.

Q. Are you going to be a dominant player in your 30s? Human body, human nature, you get to your 30s, not necessarily the same. Do you feel like you are the same player you were five or six years ago and does that motivate you going forward?

T.J. WATT: Absolutely. Cam Heyward is doing it going into his 40s, it seems like.

I do. In all honesty, I do have a great teammate in Cam to look to to how you sustain your career. And that's something that's important to me. It's something that I want to give to the city of Pittsburgh and I want to give to this organization is longevity and doing everything I possibly can each and every day to have success on the football field.

Q. Last year, T.J., you were talking about how there's a big difference between the guys who have won a Super Bowl and those who haven't. What gives you confidence over the course of this new contract that you guys can take the necessary steps to get there?

T.J. WATT: I think that it's the endless pursuit of it and just wanting to continue to do everything possible, turning over every stone. And as to this point, we haven't been able to do that.

And you see the aggressiveness that we're taking organizationally. I'm doing everything I can personally, whether that's moving around, mentoring younger guys as much as I possibly can, asking guys who have won Super Bowls before, whether here in this building or not, what we can do. And I think that's really all that we can do and just keep putting our heads down and working.

We can sit here and talk and talk and talk about not winning a playoff game and how much I want to do it, but at the end of the day, that's just lip service. It's all about what we do, and that's why I'm excited to be back here. That's why I'm excited to get to know each and every guy on this new team that we have and get to work accident, man.

Q. Is this more change maybe than you expected that they would make? They've been making trades and signings and even going into late June making a big deal.



T.J. WATT: I mean, the longer I'm in the league, the more turnover it seems to have year in and year out, honestly, just because I don't have a lot of guys in my draft class, if any, with me anymore.

Like I said before, it's all about being aggressive, and you love to see the front office be aggressive and go out and acquire guys that we all truly feel like are going to help us get over the hump, and I'm excited to get to work with them.

Q. After the draft Mike Tomlin said the draft and free agency physicality was targeted. Was that needed?

T.J. WATT: Yeah, I mean, especially on the defensive side of the ball. I think we need to -- teams need to understand that when they come to Pittsburgh, when they play the Steelers, it's a certain brand of football, and that's why you see, especially on the D line drafting, a D lineman in the first round is kind of setting the tone to emulating that message and getting that message across.

That's why we tackle so much in training camp. That's why we go full pads as much as we do, and it'll be interesting to see guys that have been other places that come here for the first time and see how much that we tackle, but it definitely is important.

Q. There's turnover every single year, but is this year just a little bit different? Is there something that happened in this particular off season with the way this defense has changed that excites you maybe in a different way than it has in the past?

T.J. WATT: I don't think it's possible for me to get more excited going into each and every season. Honestly, I think that there are a lot of narratives and a lot of things that are flashy out there in the media for you guys to cover as far as the people, the high-profile guys that we acquired, but every season I'm very confident in the guys we have in our locker room, whether high-profile guys or not. I mean, just thinking of a guy like Cory Trice, a guy that isn't going to be known in the national media, but I'm excited to see what he brings to the table this fall.

So I'm excited every year. I don't think it's possible to be more excited than I have been in the past.

Q. Patrick just a little ago he said that this is really a proving year especially for the guys on defense. What is the biggest focus for you guys kind of as a collective coming into camp here?

T.J. WATT: Yeah. I think it's getting back to being a really,

really hard-nosed football team, especially on the defensive side of the ball, setting hard goals and sticking to them. And teams need to know what's coming when they see the Pittsburgh Steelers defense. And not to say that they haven't in the past or that we haven't taken pride in it, but I think it's something that we can definitely talk more about openly about our goals as a defensive unit and hold each other accountable.

Q. What was your reaction to Minkah being traded?

T.J. WATT: I was shocked. I was just as shocked as I'm sure everybody in this room was. Minkah is a great friend, a great teammate. Unfortunately, the business side of things, I wish him nothing but the best, but obviously the front office felt like they needed to go a different direction. I'm excited about the new talent that we acquired via the trade, but the business is just the business sometimes.

Q. We talked to Alex and Nick and even your position coach, Denzel. During your negotiations, all of them expressed a lot of confidence that this is going to work out. We're not worried about it, and they were in constant contact with you. How important was that for you to have that connection with them and that they understood this was going to be a thing?

T.J. WATT: Yeah, it's cool. When I've been doing it this long, you go through a lot of people go through their negotiations, and then obviously you go through some yourself, and everybody ever since I've been here has been really cool about understanding the business side and separating business and football, and those guys are all great. I mean it was nice to have Herbig up and training with me for the last month or so, just to be able to have another NFL guy that's in the locker room here. We do the same drills and stuff to be able to measure up where we are in the off season.

Q. Talk about the narratives of negotiations. Can you address the one that was out there about were you waiting to see what Crosby and Garrett got in their deals before you came to a conclusion on yours, or like your brother said, would you have been fine with just signing a deal day one if it had come before Maxx's deal was even announced?

T.J. WATT: Yeah. I mean, timing, it takes two to get a deal done. That's all I'll say about that. But I'm just glad that a deal got done when it did, and I'm glad to be here.

Q. More ways people can be recognized and voted for awards. What does being the highest paid defensive player mean to you and what do you make of that as a way of recognizing your value?



T.J. WATT: It's hard to fathom. I'm just being as blunt as I can about it. It truly is. It's an insane life that I live. I get to do what I love for a living. I'm living the absolute dream. I don't take that for granted one bit at all.

The money side of it is hard to really wrap my head around it and I'm sure one day I will, but right now it's still all crazy to me. But more than anything, I wanted to play football. I want to play football. I want to continue to giving give everything that I possibly can to this city and this organization. There is so much more, as Coach T would say, meat on the bone. There's so much more that I can give, that I want to give, and that's what's most important to me.

Q. T.J., what's your reaction to Aaron Rodgers' signing, and what do you think the keys will be for him to fit with the Steelers culture?

T.J. WATT: I mean, he's been around the block quite some time. So I think he is going to bring a lot to the table. I'm excited to be able to get to see him. I haven't been able to shake his hand and say hello yet. Obviously seen him after games here and there. But I'm excited, just like all the new guys we have, to be able to get to work and stop doing all these press conferences and play football.

Q. Karl Dunbar calls Sawyer one of his guys. He considers him a third defensive lineman. He's a big guy, 265, 260. You look like you've gained some weight this year. Is that becoming a defensive end position more?

T.J. WATT: I think it's just trying to get as many people on the field as we possibly can, especially when you only are five outside linebackers, and on game day it's hard when -- I know when they're trying to set the roster of how many guys are going to be up at what position, and when you have that hybrid role as a defensive tackle or an outside linebacker, it might be a little bit more on their plate as far as play calling and drops in certain coverages, but I think it's very beneficial when you have a Leal or a Sawyer who can play kind of that hybrid role and also cover kicks or cover punts. It makes those decisions a little bit easier on game day.

Q. Have you added weight?

T.J. WATT: No. I'm right about the same. Thanks, though.

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