

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Coach Mike Tomlin

Weekday Press Conference



MIKE TOMLIN: Good afternoon. Certainly we're excited about the start of our camp for 2025. It's good to see this collection of talent that we've been able to assemble. Even into summer we continue to work on the talent acquisition component of this team development.

Now the vast majority of that is over and now it's about developing individual and collective football skills, division of labor roles, technical expertise, so just really excited.

Just to look at the group, really excited to see the group work today and display their physical conditioning and readiness in that area, and so now we embark upon in journey that will be our 2025 season.

I'll pause and open for questions.

Q. I know every year you have turnover of course. Have you ever had so much turnover - but you used the word talent -- talented players like this, and how do you make it all mesh together?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm really excited about this, and maybe in a lot of ways from that perspective this is new territory for us. Oftentimes our interest in people is dependent upon relationships. They might be new to the Pittsburgh Steelers, but most of the guys we've acquired we've had some intimate knowledge of them as individuals and as players and have really liked them at earlier portions of their career at different points in the process.

Q. Hey, Mike, obviously you work in the business realm of this, but to have TJ Watt sign now and you think about potential distractions, how much of a relief or you check the box on having at that done now?

MIKE TOMLIN: Certainly we're glad that the business component of it is done and he's here and ready to work, but I don't know about the relief component of it. I just know when the two sides are properly motivated, him wanting to be here and us wanting him here, that it was a matter of time before it worked out. I think the speed in

which it happened once they really got focused and serious is reflective of that.

Q. Mike, is there anybody not here and do you have any updates...

MIKE TOMLIN: Everyone is present and accounted for. We have one NFI. Isaac Seumalo has a soft tissue injury that could slow him at the early portions. Other than that, all present and accounted for and ready to work tomorrow morning.

Q. Talked about TJ Watt. He's talked a lot about the big difference between guys who are great players and won Super Bowls and guys who haven't. During this next chunk of his tenure here in Pittsburgh, what steps will be taken to help him become one of those Lombardi boys?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm not worried about the rest of his tenure. I'm worried about 2025. I'm excited about the talent we acquired. That's about getting about the business of readying them individually and collectively for this season. Our intentions are 2025.

Q. Some of those relationships, Jalen Ramsey said you met with him all the way back during his pro days. What is it about his skillset that kind of prompted bringing him in here all these years later?

MIKE TOMLIN: He's a football player first and positional player second. When he came out in the draft I think he was the No. 1 safety on our board as well as the No. 1 corner on our board. I think that speaks to his versatility. His tape has done nothing but solidify that perspective we had on him since he's been in the league.

Over the course of his year you've seen him do a variety of things, play inside and play out. All the components of the game. Man to man coverage, run support. He has an appetite for it all. I think that's why we were excited about him when he came out and that's why we continue to have that level of excitement about him and excited about him being a components of this.

Q. What do you remember about that pro day? What

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impressed most back then?

MIKE TOMLIN: Just his line of questioning was really impressive. Sometimes, you know, just the nature of the questions are attractive. He had good, educated questions. He asked about things that are really pertinent to being successful in football and in this league.

When they're in the right neighborhood from a question standpoint, that gives you a good insight into their mindset, and definitely he's confirmed that over the course of his career.

Q. How does he fit into replacing Minkah?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, I don't know that he fits in in terms of replacing Minkah, but this is a coverage league. You need unbelievable depth and talent at the cornerback position, because people have it in their receiver corps. We use a variety of schematics in an effort to minimize passing offenses.

You got to be able to play matchup football, play man to man, particularly against the elite and deep groups. The talent we acquired at that position, particularly the cornerback position, allows us to do that in all circumstances.

When you got guys like Jalen Ramsey and Slay, and JPJ, man, we can much up and play man to man versus anyone.

That's what is exciting to us, our ability to match up and play man to man against anyone in this game. I think it's going to do nothing but strengthen our schematics, the supplemental things, the zone pressures, the bogus pressure and things of that nature.

And so really excited about the talent that we acquired, particularly at the cornerback position. You can and Brandin Echols to that discussion as well.

We've done an awesome job just fortifying that corner position from a talent and depth standpoint that's going to allow us to match up against some of the many explosive units and players within them that we compete against.

Q. How important is that to compound or to counter what teams have been trying to do with the quick passing attack to slow down guys like TJ Watt and your defense?

MIKE TOMLIN: Again, I don't care about what the Jones are up to. I'm talking about why we build and why we're focused. Acquiring talent at that position and depth at that

position I think is critical to playing elite defense in 2025.

Q. Now that the business side is done with TJ, have you had football conversations along those lines about maybe moving him around a little bit more, doing different things with him, or are those conversations to come?

MIKE TOMLIN: Those conversations have been ongoing in spite of the business. We've had an ongoing relationship for a number of years and he has a desire to be obviously successful, and we do for him as well.

So that's just been ongoing and part of our offseason leading up to now.

Q. Will you start Ramsey in a specific spot and see what he can do from there, or move him around and see where he best fits?

MIKE TOMLIN: We're going to start him regardless. Where we move him around and things really depends on what offenses are doing. Make no mistake, those Top 3 corners I mentioned, Jalen Ramsey and Slay and Joey Porter, Jr., they're going to be on the field. I don't care when offenses come out in.

Q. Is Slay safety potential?

MIKE TOMLIN: They're coverage people. Describe them however you wish to describe them. They're capable of covering eligibles and minimizing the time and successfulness of offensive pass game.

Q. More cover four in that regard?

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, we got everything at our disposal with this collection of coverage people to be quite honest with you. That's why we had the intentions that we had in terms of the talent acquisition.

Q. When you say coverage people, tight ends or receivers, just catch the ball people, same thing?

MIKE TOMLIN: Eligibles, exactly. Receivers as in R-E-C.

Q. Would you say the same thing about Jonnu Smith that you said about Jalen as far as being a football player first and the position second?

MIKE TOMLIN: Without a doubt. And the intentions were the same there. We really view it through the same lens. Forget how you describe him or why. An H, a Z, what have you. He's a dynamic guy with the ball in his hands. He's a matchup issue. I think he led the quote/unquote tight end



group in the NFL last year in terms of yards after catch.

He had 800+ yards and eight touchdowns, so that's an eligible that's capable of making some splash plays for us and doing it in a variety of ways. He has firsthand experience with our offensive playcaller, so we're really excited about that.

Q. The flipside of that all that is Minkah is gone. How difficult was to it part ways with someone that meant so much to this team?

MIKE TOMLIN: Very difficult. His experience here and the production that he gave us speaks for itself. But you got to make tough choices, and obviously I've been talking glowingly about two top notch players that we acquired in that. But I don't obviously lessen the impact of a player like Minkah.

So we really excited about the acquisition of two significant players on both sides of the ball, particularly as it pertains to the pass game. Certainly it's created challenges in other areas that I'm excited about sorting through in an environment like this where we divide the labor up and see who is capable of what.

Q. How do you get Aaron ready for the season but also be a little careful being 41?

MIKE TOMLIN: He's a workaholic. I don't have a whole lot of reservations about that. I think he's hardened himself over the course of his career with his attitude toward work. Certainly I'm going to limit him in some instances. When I do, it's going to be more about elevating opportunities for guys like Will Howard and less about preserving him to be quite honest with you.

Q. He didn't participate in any of the team practice or mini camp? Is that because of how new he was to you?

MIKE TOMLIN: You said it.

Q. And then do you anticipate him being ready to go for that kind of start?

MIKE TOMLIN: Absolutely.

Q. Spencer Anderson step in for Isaac, and what's your timeline for Isaac?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't have a specific timeline for Isaac as I sit here today because I hadn't had intimate meetings with the medical staff just in terms of the declaration. I'm comfortable with Spence. Isaac didn't get a lot of work in

the spring and Spence did. Spence has played a lot ball for us here in recent years, particularly at that position. No real angst in regard to that discussion.

Q. You said that you're just worried about 2025 right now. How do you even consider 2026, '27, '28, or do you leave that up to Omar?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm standing at this podium on the first day of training camp. Man, I am not looking beyond the here and now.

Q. Mike, you call this new territory in a way for your group. You've been doing this a long time. Does that add a little bit of juice for you personally because the challenges may be a little bit different than previously?

MIKE TOMLIN: I could tell you that, but, you know, it's July 23rd, man, it's juice time. This is who we are. This is what we do.

The juice will be there regardless.

Q. When you talk about bringing in new players and assimilating them into the team, schematically and culturally, how different when you're talking about guys who are former MVPs, multiple time all pros, how do you go about that maybe different than regular additions?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know that it's dramatically different. You know, this team development process is development in a lot of ways. It's individuals from a knowledge perspective, from a technical development perspective, but it's also as a collective. That collective growth has a lot to do with teamwork and gaining an understanding of the things that we value here culturally and things of that nature.

And so that applies to all new people regardless of what their resumes might read. I think it's one of the benefits to coming to a destination camp. We do so very intentionally. It gives us an opportunity to capture that which we cannot measure, but we know is significant in terms of team building.

That's that intangible component, that mutual respect, that understanding, that knowledge beyond surface level things. We get an opportunity to work at that in an environment like this just as we do the tangible things.

Q. Mike, when you were having your initial offseason meetings in January, by the time you got to this moment on July 23rd did you anticipate this much change in the roster?

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MIKE TOMLIN: You know, we just go about the business of building our team to the best of our ability. You know, in some instances during that initial discussion we didn't know if certain people would be available, so I just think everyone starts their journey that time of year with the intentions of being the very best they can be, assimilating the best 90, which you take the 53. That's always our mentality. That was the mentality then.

Some of the opportunities kind of came up along the way, and so I would be misrepresenting the intentions or the mindset if I talked about some of that way back in January.

Q. Going back to what you said at the outset about talent the acquisition process still potentially being ongoing. Jonnu coming here, does that offset to the departure of Pickens a little bit, or is that an avenue you still might be investigating.

MIKE TOMLIN: We'll see. I think that's some of those questions are answered in team development, in the performance of not only Jonnu, but others. It's a big camp for Roman Wilson for example. He's a second-year player. I know he played little, if any, last year, but the expectations of a second year player are the same. He showed up highly conditioned and he's had a really good offseason.

So I don't know that I come in with any level of anticipation of who specifically is going to do what in regards to the question that you asked, but more about just rolling that ball out and beginning this process and see who has evolved or who is evolving.

Q. Mike, what adjustments did you make to the conditioning test this year?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know that we made any adjustments. I just did what I thought was appropriate for this group this year. The group was highly conditioned in the spring and displayed that. At weigh-ins I think the weights reflected their overall readiness.

From my perspective it was just a box to check and now we're on to football.

Q. In the Rodgers process, at what point were you pretty comfortable he was coming and did you ever waver from that and get a little worried?

MIKE TOMLIN: I probably was pretty comfortable well before you guys, you know. And no, did I not waver from that.