

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Mike Tomlin

Weekday Press Conference

MIKE TOMLIN: Good afternoon. Really excited about Sunday Night Football in Acrisure versus Green Bay.

As always, I'll start with a quick review of our last performance. Feels a little bit stale, I haven't had an opportunity to visit with you guys since.

As I mentioned after the game, a couple building blocks of the engineering of victory, man, that we didn't take care of. I think that's why the game unfolded the way that it did.

For us, we got to stop the run more effectively. We feel like that's a building block for us to play good defense, to get offenses in more one-dimensional passing circumstances, to get people in more advantageous possession down circumstances for us.

Our inability to stop the run I think created that. That was an issue for us. Really started kind of in the second quarter when Brown popped a couple of runs, went on from there. Never felt like we had an opportunity to stabilize that component of the game.

We have been trending the right way in that space for a number of weeks, but certainly last week was a setback in that area. I think it really created an environment where we weren't controlling the game from that perspective.

I think the same could be said on the offensive side. We turned the ball over twice. Really that hadn't been us. We've been really good at protecting and preserving the football. If you get a couple turnovers, you're not stopping the run, that's just not a good posture to play from. We certainly didn't take the ball away. To be minus-two in a hostile place while not stopping the run, it's kind of a catalyst for losing.

You couple that with the fact we were highly penalized, had some significant penalties. I thought the false start on fourth and one when we were in the red area was a four-point-like penalty. In games like that, you can't afford to have them. The ability to execute in that space, in the



red zone, is significant whether it's defensively in terms of getting stops or offensively finishing.

I think in the midst of that when we got that false start, had to settle for a field goal, that was significant, as well.

My perspective is things were going well until they weren't. We played about a good quarter of football, then we didn't do a good enough job stopping the run or preserving or protecting the ball. We got highly penalized. It made it an uphill battle from there.

I was really appreciative of the effort. Thought the guys fought their tails off. We made some plays certainly on offense. I thought we had a necessary stop on defense there about five or six minutes to go in the game to give us another shot at it.

Just as a collective, man, I thought they fought particularly in less-than-ideal circumstances, but certainly we came up short. There's some lessons to be learned from that.

As we move into this week, I'll quickly talk about some injury things:

Calvin Austin is scheduled to work this week. We'll let his participation and the quality of that participation be our guide in terms of his availability. As we stand here today, we're optimistic. I know certainly he's optimistic about his ability to be included.

We had some bumps and bruises associated with play. But after a long weekend of rehabilitation, I doubt any of those are significant in terms of limiting someone's availability. It may limit the availability at the top of the week. We have some veteran players and things of that nature that we'll minimize a little bit tomorrow. As we lean in on that game, I don't expect any of those things to kind of be an issue.

Let's talk Green Bay. First I'll start with the defense. Got a lot of respect for Jeff Hafley, the work he's doing over there with those guys. They're fundamentally sound. They don't give up big plays. I think they're third in the league in explosion run plays, first in the league with explosion pass plays. Collectively with both they're certainly number one.

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They keep the ball inside and front. They set good edges. They reduce the amount of grass we have to play in. In doing so, man, they make offenses operate in an effort to score on 'em. You got to be clean. You got to execute for blocks of plays at a time. You got to execute situational plays. You got to play penalty-free. When you don't give up big plays, it creates all of those obstacles for an offensive unit. They're doing that and doing it at a high level.

They've invested a lot in their edge people up front. They've reaped the rewards of it. They play behind that rush. Micah Parsons, I can't say enough about him and his talents. You saw just the other day what he's capable of doing. I think that's really indicative of the impact that a guy like him has.

You better stay out of one-dimensional circumstances. You better stay on schedule. In doing so, man, you really limit situations where he has an opportunity to take over.

Arizona was in that game, but they had to take some risk there towards the end in an effort to pursue victory. They got somewhat one-dimensional. When you get in those circumstances, they got an opportunity to really control the game. He shut the game down with two really big sacks. We have our hands full, but not only with him. With Gary, Van Ness. They've got a lot of talented. They've invested a lot of resources in that position up front.

They got a real good secondary. They play well as a collective, communicate well, minimize big plays. Quay in the inside up front is a hub of communication. He's been in the league now for a number of years. All-situations linebacker. He's good versus the run, versus the pass, a good blitz. His blitz skills were on display last week against Arizona. I think he had two sacks in that game. The running back pickup component of the blitz is going to be really significant if we want to win those situational moments.

Looking at Green Bay's offense, it starts with Josh Jacobs, not only because of the circumstances that we're in coming off of a subpar performance in terms of stopping the run, he's just a catalyst for a lot that goes on with them.

He's a nuts-and-bolts player. Really good. Got a good run demeanor. His (indiscernible) almost always fall the right way from his perspective. We played against him recently when he was in Vegas. He's been a big-time acquisition for them. I think he's got 23 rushing touchdowns since they acquired him last year. That's just a staggering number. But it speaks to his involvement in what it is that they do.

He's obviously the central component in their run game. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention his passing game exploits as well. His screen game, his ability to turn short to long in the check down game is really impressive. He certainly has our attention.

Jordan Love and his talents, the way that he spreads the ball around to a variety of people, his ability to extend plays, his mobility. They're all things that certainly has our attention.

We played him in '23. Somewhat physically familiar with that skill set. But we still got to make plays. His talents really thin you out schematically. His willingness and ability to spread the ball around to a lot of people.

Tucker at tight end is really significant. He gets down the field. They throw him tight end screens. He's big in the misdirection passing game. He's just a force within their offensive system.

They got a young rookie golden out of Texas that's increasing his participation with each passing week. His talents are starting to show.

I think Watson has been practicing. So they may get Watson back this week. They got Dobbs. They got a complete repertoire of people to spread the ball around to. They got a solid running game.

Certainly, man, we have a big week ahead of us from a prep standpoint. We have to be good in situations. When you play people that are as well-rounded as this group, you have to get off the field when given an opportunity, preserve points when given an opportunity.

The special teams component of the game is going to be a big component of the game. We have two old warhorse coordinators in Danny Smith and Rich Bisiccia. I imagine they have gone against each other quite a bit over the years. Worked with Rich. Got a lot of respect for his schematics, how he distributes the labor in that space. Expect that to be a hotly contested component of the game as well.

It's Sunday night ball. We respect and appreciate an opportunity to play at prime time, particularly in Acrisure. Excited about it. We show our excitement by being wired in in prep and I'm looking forward to a good week of that.

I will pause and open it up for questions.

Q. When you look at the number of plays the opponents run, like the last four games, does something like that have your attention? How is that



explainable?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's a lot of layers to that discussion. Sometimes it's the pace of play of others, how they're going about their business, particularly when you have quick strikes, big plays. We've had big plays in some of those games. The big play last week, the big play to DK in Dublin.

When you get one-play drives, things of that nature, there's a lot of variables in that discussion. It's not always good, it's not always bad, particularly if you're looking at a small block of time.

Q. Not terribly alarming?

MIKE TOMLIN: Not as I stand here today.

Q. 29 snaps Thursday night. When you reviewed the game, was that a personnel performance or part of the plan to limit him?

MIKE TOMLIN: Certainly our inability to control the run and limiting one-dimensional passing circumstances probably affected his participation some.

Again, we got a lot of good players. As I mentioned often when you guys talk about playing time, just keep watching. We're going to utilize all our good players.

Sometimes games unfold, whether schematics or matchups or how things unfold, you guys were asking me about Muth last week. I imagine you're not going to ask me about Muth this week. That's just an example of it.

Q. Aaron has been extending the plays a little bit more, more mobile. What do you think is behind that? Is he just getting more comfortable in the offense or does his body look like maybe he's turning back the clock?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think he's probably getting more comfortable with not only the people, the timing component, the personnel component, but the spacing, the strategic component, where people are. He's always done that. That's always been a component of his game. From my perspective, the more it shows up, it just indicates comfort to me.

Q. How do you evaluate the performance of the secondary?

MIKE TOMLIN: Certainly hasn't met my vision to this point. I'm not discouraged. We got good people there, good players, good people, guys that have good relationships

with the game. We're just going to keep working.

Q. What caused the issues stopping the run? Are they similar to what we saw the first couple weeks of the season?

MIKE TOMLIN: In some ways yes, in some ways no. It's really simple when you're not stopping the run: usually, man, people are out of their gaps. If you're not being schemed. They won some of those instances. That's just a component of it, though.

Somebody can break the line of scrimmage and have an eight- or nine-yard run. You live to play another down. They had a 25-, 37-yard run. That makes to multi-layers of dysfunction, people out of their gap, us not keeping the ball in a confined space once it gets to the second and third level.

There's a gap integrity component of it. That's up front. Oftentimes that's reflected by yards per. But the explosion play component of it is about netting them and keeping the ball in a constricted space. We didn't do a good job of either.

Q. How do you bridge that gap of talking about what's wrong and making it better, given the resources you have?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's really simple, guys: you can have a couple of plays and create a catastrophic day. They had a 25-yard run and a 37-yard run. That's all that's required. You get those big runs, they flip the field, they put them in scoring position, they change the trajectory of your strategy, et cetera.

It's not 60 snaps we're talking about here. In our business, at this level, one or two plays are the difference between having a good day and a catastrophic day.

Q. We talk a lot about how teams game plan for T.J., you game plan for Miles. Do you put Micah Parsons in that same camp?

MIKE TOMLIN: Most certainly (smiling). I think his paycheck indicates so.

Q. Is there anything from a coverage standpoint you can do to make quarterbacks hold onto the ball longer for your pass-rush?

MIKE TOMLIN: No doubt. Disguises, the coverage concepts themselves, the tightness or looseness of the coverage is a component of it. Again, minimizing the run game is a component of that.



When you're on schedule, you can run rhythmic passing. None of these things happen in a vacuum. Getting them behind the sticks will make the quarterback hold onto the ball longer, particularly as it pertains to the line game. When it's third down and two or three, those balls generally come out pretty quickly.

Q. The tightness and looseness, does that press man?

MIKE TOMLIN: Or up-posture zones. Tight and looseness doesn't necessarily speak to man or zone. It speaks to the contour or structure pre-snap.

Q. Do you have a sense of the magnitude of this matchup for Aaron Rodgers facing another former team this season?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't. Aaron has been at it a long time. He's got an awesome relationship with this game. Haven't been with him for a long time. He's been fired up every single week. I imagine it's going to be the same.

I imagine some external things are going to make more out of it than it is for him. He's playing and playing to win. That's what he does. That's kind of my perspective on it.

Q. Now that you've gotten to work with him throughout this off-season, up to this point, what has impressed you about what you've learned from him that maybe you didn't know previously?

MIKE TOMLIN: I just I've been in this thing long enough you don't stumble into 20-plus years of service in this business. There's unique habits, unique relationships with the game of football. I anticipated that.

It still doesn't make it less impressive, his day to day, what he's willing to do. He's been in the building all day today. He loves it. It's who he is. He loves the process. He loves to talk ball. He loves to educate his teammates to get on the same page.

He doesn't tire in terms of seeking resolution to issues. There's a lot of good things about him other than obviously his physical talents and skills that have been really impressive.

Again, as I mentioned, not that I'm shocked by it, but it's still highly appreciated.

Q. After the game Randy took a lot of blame for what happened. Overly critical? Fair assessment?

MIKE TOMLIN: No, man, he's got big shoulders. If that's

how he felt, that's how he felt.

Q. You rank in the bottom half the league stopping the third down. Now you're facing an offense that has been the best at that. What do you have to do to be better?

MIKE TOMLIN: We got to put together a good plan, have a good week. We have to have detailed execution as a collective. That's the ingredients.

Q. What kind of self-criticism did you do during this mini bye?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's business as usual for us. We get some additional days. We going to look within. We also going to look at things trending in the league. It just wasn't a lot of time between this mini break and the one we just had. It's business as usual for us.

Q. It seems like Aaron has endeared himself to the locker room quickly. Did you anticipate his ability to assimilate to the culture so quickly?

MIKE TOMLIN: I did. I just know too many people that have worked with him in other locations. I knew how his teammates felt about him in other places. Not shocked by that at all.

Q. Your secondary has a lot of experience, but not in this system playing together. Is that maybe attributed to why there were some problems?

MIKE TOMLIN: I'm sure it's a component of it. We don't seek comfort or find comfort in that. We got to be better.

Q. You have been averaging decent yardage on the ground in the gaps with McCormick and Fautanu. What have they done?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's not those guys individually. It's about the collective. I think largely our run game has been trending in the right direction for about a month or so now. But that's a reasonable thing to happen.

We got a young group. They're gaining maturity individually and collectively. Gaining the type of cohesion that's going to allow that to happen. I think it's a global trajectory thing, not about two people within the collective.

Q. You've used did different combinations of guys at safety. Would you ideally like to get two guys or are you comfortable to mix?

MIKE TOMLIN: What you'd like to do in the reality of this



business is different, particularly as it pertains to player availability. That's why it's very important that you have a deep and talented group, that you do a good job of coaching all parties involved, because everybody gets an opportunity to ante up and kick in at some point.

I've just trained myself over the years to never wait for the scenario you mentioned. You better coach everybody all the time because generally there's always going to be some challenges from a player availability standpoint, man. The expectation is the expectation.

Q. It looked like Broderick got a little too enthusiastic after the touchdown. What was your reaction to that?

MIKE TOMLIN: I never saw it. I didn't see it live. I didn't see it in replay. I heard about it. I don't really have a reaction.

Q. Is Cory close to coming back to practice?

MIKE TOMLIN: He is.

Q. Is Miles out for the season or...

MIKE TOMLIN: Miles is out for the season. Miles had knee surgery that was deemed a success. Certainly he's facing rehabilitation at this juncture. Our heart aches for Miles. Obviously he's a significant component of what we do, particularly in the special teams space.

It's never one man. It's probably a collection of men that have to step up when you face a challenge like that.

Pep did a nice job as a personal protector on our punt team last week. There will be no exhale there. That's something that's got to be earned over a long period of time.

We've played a lot of football with Miles in that spot. That's the quarterback of the punt team, if you will. That certainly has our attention as we work to fortify the spaces, the voided spaces, where he's usually an asset to us.

Q. In terms of play style and approach of how they like to rush Parsons, is there at all a comp you can draw to how you guys successfully contained Garrett a couple weeks or?

MIKE TOMLIN: It can be. Certainly they're two different people in terms of what makes them great in how they get to the quarterback. How they're deployed, the distribution of rushes, number of rushes. Both groups play behind their four-man rush, both guys are edge players, capable of moving around either side.

The same could be said against any of the elite rushers, Maxx Crosby in Vegas. They play behind their four-man rush. He moves around. That's what you do when you have elite players like those guys.

Q. What is the line you have to walk when you play a team like Cincinnati and you want to use a lot of sub packages, then they start to run the ball on you? Juggling act?

MIKE TOMLIN: I just think that's the strategic part of the game that's never going anywhere. That's what we do all week, you know? Certainly going into games, teams have personalities, but your ability to adapt and adjust in game is a major component of engineering success.

Those type of things go down in a myriad of ways every week. You make plans, you fortify those plans with reps and work. At the same time you're light on your feet because you understand what you're looking at in stadium oftentimes requires adaptation.

Q. Arthur Smith has worked with three very different quarterbacks, had success. What stands out about the way he's continued to evolve and modify his offense?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think that's one of the things that was attractive to me about him. The same could be said for his time spent in Tennessee and Atlanta.

Quarterbacks vary in skill sets. Matt Ryan was a pocket passer. Mariota was with a mover. Tandy could move and was a grizzly veteran.

He's been around a variety of guys, but he's always been adaptable. That adaptability is a major component of coaching. He's very good at it.

He certainly has a mode of operation, things that he values. But he's pliable enough to bring the ball not only to his quarterback and their skill set, but to the talent within the collective, as well.

Q. You had a lot of success throwing to tight ends against the Bengals. How much has their usage alleviated some of the lack of depth in the wide receiver room?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think we've been talking about that since the beginning of team development. We got a deep and talented group in that space. They're all eligibles. They are position-less. Receivers are REC. That's been kind of the spirit we've operated in all season.



Q. Joey had a couple of penalties in that game. Part of that matchup or something you're seeing that needs to be corrected?

MIKE TOMLIN: I would imagine those two receivers got something to do with it.

Q. Any lingering concerns about the playing surface?

MIKE TOMLIN: Not from my perspective, man. I am not a grass expert. I haven't cut my grass in a long, long time. I coach football. I'm going to stay in my lane. I don't even know who cuts my grass (smiling).

Q. Malik Harrison close to being activated? Where might he help you?

MIKE TOMLIN: He's working. He's at that stage, in that 21-day window where he's working. We're just going to watch his work and let the quality of his work be our guide whether or not we consider him.

Q. What can be said about a matchup like this featuring very storied franchises?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's life in the National Football League. Probably what I enjoy most about it. Each week there's something to be fired up about.

A lot of respect for that organization historically and present day with their leadership, players and so forth. We've been in some big games with them. I would imagine this is not going to be any different. It's exciting. It's the NFL.

Q. Does it get you excited to alternate uniforms, the helmets, something that elevates this game even more?

MIKE TOMLIN: That's like the grass for me (smiling). I got some other priorities. I probably wouldn't have known about that had you not informed me.

Q. What have you done to win the short yardage situations?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, I don't know. The difference between being number one and not being number one is minute. We're just trying to be our very best, particularly in situations. Where we are particularly at this stage of the journey is where we are. We're not overanalyzing it.

Q. How does that whole group adjust to being four tight ends that all get playing time?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's been great. It's been great since day zero of team development. The collective welcomed John with open arms. He's worked hard to fit in, be a component of the group.

He realizes he's the elder statesman in the group even though he's new. He's absorbed some big brother like responsibilities in terms of being the grizzly veteran.

A good collection of talent and a good collection of people. I think when you have that, that's what you're looking for. You have an opportunity for it to work. It has. I see no reason why it won't continue.

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