

# Pittsburgh Steelers

## Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach Mike Tomlin

### Weekday Press Conference



MIKE TOMLIN: Good afternoon. As always, I'll start with a quick review of our last performance. As I said after the game, just really disappointing on a lot of fronts, but probably the most important component is we didn't put 60 minutes of football together.

Felt like we were doing the things we needed to do over the course of the first 30 minutes of action, although it wasn't perfect by any stretch.

You know, you always a little bit concerned when you're settling for field goals when you're playing good people. Seems like touchdowns is how it gets done in our business at this level, so it was a little bit less than comfortable at halftime settling for three field goals.

I think those drives were stopped by penalties and negative plays on first and ten; put us in some second and long circumstances. We didn't perform very well in second and long, not only in the first half of the game, but in the totality of the game. It produced a lot of third and longs in the game.

That's low percentage conversion rates for us and low percentage conversion rates for everyone to be quite honest with you. We were more third and longs in that game than we're comfortable with, and I think we suffered the consequences of that, particularly as the game wore on.

On the other side of the ball I thought a couple third down conversions in the third quarter were significant, not only in terms of keeping us on the field and producing touchdown-scoring drives, but it changed the texture of the day.

They got 60 yards on one third down conversion and 35 on another. That's 100 yards on two plays, field-flipping plays, touchdown-drive-producing plays, and I just didn't think we did a nice job recovering from those.

First and foremost you don't want those plays to happen,

but after they happen, I didn't think we did a good enough job recovering and finding our footing as a collective football group, offense, defense, and special teams, in an effort to make the necessary plays over the last 15 minutes to win the game.

Regarding those plays, we certainly need to be better in third down than we've been. Doesn't necessarily mean dramatic changes in terms of schematics and things of that nature. If you look at those two plays, on the 60 yard play the quarterback was hit as he let it go. So it's details that are usually the difference when it's a millisecond.

On the roughly 35 yard play he got outside the pocket on us and extended, and we certainly got to do a better job of keeping him constricted in the pocket and getting two guys at the catch point down the grass.

That's one thing we didn't do in either circumstance. We play a lot of the man-free concepts and usually gives us an opportunity to get two guys at the ball down the grass. We didn't in those instances, and produced field-flipping touchdown-drive-producing plays that really changed the texture of the ball game.

For us, we view all three phases as an opportunity to win. We didn't make the necessary plays in the three phases to secure victory. There are some personality things that were concerning as the game wore on.

The turnover component of the game is something that we value here obviously and is one of the building blocks for engineering victory for us. We turned the ball over in the second half. Didn't get any turnovers. I think that's the second game in a row where we didn't get any turnovers.

That hadn't been us and we certainly need to get back to that component of our winning formula: Protecting and preserving the football while taking it away from our opponent is certainly going to be significant this week when we lean in and play the Colts. They're a group that does that very well.

From a health standpoint before I get directly tom Indy, update you on a couple of guys. Scotty Miller we talked about last week. Man, he had a broken finger. It has been

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repaired. How functional he is we'll determine his ability to contribute or the level or the quality of that contribution.

Daniel Ekuale has an ACL injury that will definitively have him out. DeShon Elliott is out this week with his hyperextended knee. Isaac Seumalo can be characterized as questionable with his peck injury. I just had a brief conversation with him in the training room. He's in a good mindset. He certainly is going to be limited at the early portions of the week, but he'll have a chance to contribute, particularly because he's a veteran player.

He has some global snaps in his bank that could be an asset to him in terms of being ready to play on a limited number of snaps that maybe a younger player would not have.

We got some other bumps and bruises associated with play that may limit some people at the early portions of the week. Then we'll harden that up as we get closer to game time. Not expecting any of those guys to lack availability at the end of the week.

Now, on to Indy. They're a really good football team but they need no endorsement from me. Been watching the video over the last 48 hours or so and it is telling. Starting first and foremost with their offense, they're high scoring. They don't punt very often. The way they're getting that done is pretty black and white.

They got rock solid offensive line that's been together, led by Nelson, largely for a number of years. They did a really good job of controlling the line of scrimmage and getting hats on hats. They're a good zone scheme, gap scheme, pull scheme group. Obviously Nelson is a major component of that.

Behind that collective, man, they got Jonathan Taylor who is really on top of his game right now. He has been for a number of years. I think in '22 and '23 he dealt with some injuries, but '24 through '25 you see his talents. He's significant. He's got great stop-start ability, great short area burst and vision, long speed to finish plays, as evidenced by the 80-yarder that he had last week.

He's always been explosive-play capable. When you play a guy like that it's really an all-day job because of that homerun hitting ability. Got to do a really good job setting the edges and certainly being in the appropriate gaps. They do a nice job running the ball out of a variety of personnel groups and offensive formation structures that make you cognizant of that regardless what they have on the field.

Because they play so well behind Taylor and their run

game, I think they have really done a nice job of preserving and protecting the ball as I mentioned earlier. I think four turnovers on the season. Daniel Jones has been spectacular in that space, taking care the ball, distributing the ball to a rock solid group of eligibles that's been together for a number of years now.

Pittman and Pierce have been together for a number of years. Pittman is rough and tumble, he has got in-breaking routes, chain mover, if you will. Pierce has always been a downfield threat, a guy to get one-on-one down the grass with is a problem.

And certainly coming off last week as performance where we had some one-on-one circumstances that were field-flipping plays, that certainly has our attention as we prepare today. But it's not just those two guys. They got Downs that play in the slot, is a capable interior slot receiver.

They got AD Mitchell, second round pick from a couple years ago who is really at that time. Certainly they have their first round pick, you know, the tight end out of Penn State that hadn't warmed up to it at all. Man, he's plug-and-play not only in terms of his playing ability but their utilization of him. They use him in a variety of schemes. Get the ball in his hands early and often.

Some of the things that you saw on video at Penn State you see on video Indianapolis. But that's why you take dynamic players like him that high. He's been an integral component of what they've been able to do offensively.

Can't say enough about it. Kudos to Daniel Jones and his ability to redefine his narrative, but I doubt that that can be considered an outlier today. It's a lot of pressure being a young quarterback, drafted high into programs that don't have a lot of transaction. There been a lot of examples of guys when given an opportunity to turn the page and get a new environment, the talents that made them high-round draft picks turn up.

Certainly his is turning up in 2025 in this environment. As I mentioned he's in a stable environment. Shane does an awesome job with the offensive schematics. He has a establish receiving group, guys been together a number of years. He has a veteran offensive line and running back who are on top of their game.

So when you put all those things together, man, it's not surprising that he and they are doing well. On the other side of the ball, we're familiar with these guys from a personnel standpoint because we played them quite a bit here recently, but it also is some new schematics, new to them, but not necessarily new to us.



We have competed against Lou over the years. I see some things that are certainly Lou, but he's certainly adaptable in terms of highlighting the talents of the men that he works with.

It starts inside and up front with their defense. Buckner and Stewart are grizzled veteran players really good at what they do. They control the line of scrimmage. Stewart is really tough against the run. Buckner obviously is a dynamic pass rusher on the interior. They do some things to create matchups for him on guards, on centers.

The schematic variations that you see, particularly in one-dimensional passing moments really highlights their talents. They got a nice edge group that runs deep. They play a lot of people. They're multiple. It helps them on third down. They get in a bunch of structures on third down. You can see nickel 4-2, nickel 5-1, dime 3-2, dime 4-1. Lou does a nice job keeping you off balance by mixing up a variety of personnel groups.

At the linebacker level, got a lot of respect for Franklin. He's their defensive quarterback. Just appreciate a guy who has grown and developed within a system or location. Playing them over the years, man, at the early stages of his career, he was a core team err and then he became like a rundown defender and then a support defender to Shaq Leonard, and then he became the defensive quarterback.

It's just been a nice fluid progression. He's a volume tackler. He has been for a number of years. Gets to the ball all over the field. He's a very good blitz. Lou is using him in a very similar way that he used Logan Wilson from his time in Cincinnati. You can see some parallels in terms of preparing for these guys. They use Kenny at the nickel spot in a similar way they use Mike Hilton for example at the nickel spot in Cincinnati.

Again, doesn't make operating any easier, but certainly some nice things to draw from a familiarity standpoint so that we can get better equipped or get a better understanding of some of the things they're doing so that we can counteract that.

But they're a great group. They get a bunch of turnovers. They been up on some people, people have been one dimensional and usually bad turns to worse and they've benefited from that. They've done a nice job preserving and protecting the ball. I think their point differential on the season is, I don't know, plus 150. I think it's indicative of some of the things we have been discussing.

They're a really good group. They're rolling. They got

really good momentum. It's an awesome challenge for us. I'm excited about the process that leads performances. So we got a big week ahead of us. It's always nice to perform and we're excited about that:

**Q. Cam said after the game he didn't think the players handled adversity very well. They started feeling very sorry for themselves. That was a clear case of that. Do you agree with that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I certainly agree with that. As I mentioned, I don't think I like how we responded to the explosion plays, field-flipping plays, drive-producing conversion third down that happened in the third quarter. I didn't think our offense responded very well to the non-call on the first third down of the half.

You don't always have control over what happens to you in-game, but rest assured some things are going to happen. There is ebb and flow over the course of 60 minutes. In that instance as a collective we feel like we didn't respond in the appropriate or desired way. We didn't smile in the face of it. We didn't produce the type of plays that counteract those things and get the balance back in our favor.

So we will certainly be critical of ourselves and utilizing that as fuel as we prepare for our next opportunity.

**Q. How do you fix that? It is guys looking in the mirror?**

MIKE TOMLIN: The first component is acknowledging it. You really don't get an opportunity to fix it until you face those circumstances again.

And so we spent some time acknowledging it. We're going to get back to work. We certainly believe we work in the right spirit, do the right things environmentally. We're going to get back to work, man, and wait for our opportunity to rectify it.

You can spend a lot of time talking about your ills, but the true fixes come in stadiums. That's why sometimes I'm somewhat hesitant to respond to the how-do-you-fix-it question. There are certainly procedurally things you go about fixing it but the fix happens in stadium and the rest of it is just talk.

**Q. You got a pretty much mature group, especially on defense. Should they be able to handle adversity better than they did on Sunday?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Sure. Our guys should do what we tell them to do, but they often don't. We all fall short of



perfection. That's why we're always working as individuals and as a collective, whether it's football or life.

**Q. On Elliott, you said hyperextension. Is that actually a positive thing as opposed to what you thought you saw on Sunday night?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I didn't have any preconceived notions so I just always -- I just have learned over the years to wait on clarity from the medical experts.

So I don't know that I had a perception.

**Q. Is week-to-week a fair standard to describe him?**

MIKE TOMLIN: It is.

**Q. Is he a candidate for (indiscernible)**

MIKE TOMLIN: We haven't discussed that, but you can characterize him as out for this week.

**Q. When you look at the way the offense runs, what do you miss when you don't have him on the field for that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: He's a significant component of what we do, particularly relative to some of the things that Indy does well.

He is a central figure in our secondary in terms of run defense for example. He covers tight ends in passing circumstances, so certainly we have some adapting to do in terms of how we divide the labor up this week.

But that's always the case when you lose someone, particularly someone significant. It's not a one-person job. It's a multiple-person job. That's the spirit in which we're planning as we sit here today. There will be several people given an opportunity to meet the demands of what he does for us.

**Q. Mike, what have you learned about playing against Shane Steichen over the years? Not just him coaching Indianapolis, but like in 2022...**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think the run game balance, the use of quarterback mobility, the corresponding play passes and misdirection passes, his ability to run the ball and pass the ball out of various offensive personnel groups and formation structures. The gun running game is really impressive. Quarterback up under pass game is really impressive.

He's got a well-balanced and diverse attack. He's got a

specialized division of labor. You see it being played out in some of guys that we mentioned, Pierce being the down the field threat, Pittman being a chain mover, et cetera.

But that's usually the case when you're talking about good offenses. There is well-defined division the labor, versatility, multiple personnel groups; all of that kind of reflects Shane and his group.

**Q. You said that you don't want to necessarily fundamentally change the scheme in some instances, specifically in third down. Do you look at taking over sole playcalling for defense or making adjustments?**

MIKE TOMLIN: No. That's not on the table as we sit here today. Just got to keep doing what we are doing and do it better.

**Q. There was some statements made early on before the season started about what type of defense this could be. Obviously didn't play out how you envisioned it. What do you chalk that disconnect up to?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We make no excuses about how or why we fall short. Our of job is to perform and perform at a high level and we haven't done that.

I'm excited about getting back to it. Seven games or whatever doesn't make a season. We certainly got more in front of us and more opportunities to write our story, whether it's individuals, a component of our team, whether it's our team in general.

I think that's our general mindset.

**Q. Cam and a few others talk about not enough fight. Is that the same as handling adversity or a separate issue?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think it's all being described in a variety of ways. I didn't see or hear his words and so I'm not going to speculate on what he meant.

But Cam and I are usually aligned in terms of how we see things and what we need to do to push forward.

**Q. Did you see a lack of fight?**

MIKE TOMLIN: No. I don't necessarily see a lack of fight in terms of effort. I'm talking about fight in terms of play making, you know.

You don't get credit for trying hard. We're not in the try hard business. Our fight is good production and produced





and we didn't produce enough plays over the last 30 minutes of the game in any of the phases to secure victory.

**Q. You said up in Cincinnati failure to stop the run was a component of (indiscernible) down and distance. Against Green Bay, still able to get there with short passing. Is that a similar problem that needs to be addressed?**

MIKE TOMLIN: No. I thought the run game wasn't an issue versus Green Bay. Certainly tackling and tackling in the passing game was.

Tucker was a major component of that. We didn't do a good enough job getting him on the ground in particular. I think he had 100 yards of run after catch himself.

**Q. Last two weeks quarterbacks have gotten balls out quick against your defense. How do you counteract that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think that's been our life for a number of years. Any time you got dynamic rushers, that's the first way that you work to minimize them.

I think that's everyone's agenda, to be honest with you, when they play us. To run the ball in an effort to stay on schedule. Minimize one-dimensional long yardage circumstances and to get the ball out quickly.

And so from that standpoint it's nothing new. It requires no quote-unquote adjustments. Certainly we can coach and play better.

**Q. When you install rules for defense to respond to different things, as the pre-snap plays and you're seeing mistakes that the team makes, how do you guys course correct on that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think you are always putting eight pounds in a five pound bag. That's the nature of what we do as coaches. There is never completeness of work. You never can say, oh, we got that.

No, you got it until the next time something comes up. And that's not only defensively but that's in all three phases of the game. You're continually tooling and retooling what it is that you do, making sure it remains sharp. When it doesn't, finding the appropriate fixes or alterations in an effort to get concepts, people, or units going.

**Q. Sort of to that point then, what did you determine, discover about where you guys are in the high red zone kind of to your opening comment? Aaron mentioned that as well in his postgame.**

MIKE TOMLIN: Yeah, sometimes it's just about playing clean, you know. You get a penalty and it puts you behind the chains or you have an ineffective first down play for a variety of reasons and puts you in second and long. That's kind of been our issues.

Again, I don't know that it requires anything dramatic in terms of altering the personality relative to plans or scheme. We certainly could put them in a better circumstance to minimize negative. To minimize some of the penalties that have occurred and certainly we can put them in better position to perform and they can perform better certainly.

It is certainly a component of the game that is significant for us, something that we value. We've largely been really good as an offensive unit in the red area, but certainly were not particularly in the high red Sunday night.

**Q. Mike, how do you evaluate the job that Teryl Austin has done to this point?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I've known Teryl a long time. Very capable and thorough. I largely been pleased with his work. Certainly he and I are not pleased with where we are right now from a defensive unit perspective. So we're just going to keep working.

**Q. Still see communication issues in the secondary or just guys not finishing plays?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, in some instances it's communication. Communication is always strained in the secondary. Particularly when you face with pre-snap shifts and motions. I'm not going to act like that's on earth shattering statement.

When we were talking about tooling and retooling that's a component of coaching that you will always be urgent regarding, pre-snap communication, week in and week out the adjustments change, shifts and motions change based on offensive units, based on the talent within those unit, how you chose to deploy your people based on those things.

There are alterations to communication and adjustments every week, so there is always urgency there. We can certainly be better there and we will.

**Q. Echols in, Slay late in the game, what went into that decision?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Just playing. We were rolling guys. Echols has been good for us and is deserving to play. We

played him some.

**Q. You guys are ranked last in the league in total defense. Hadn't had a takeaway since the Dublin game. What's the big offensive coordinator red flag to you?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You pick. You know, I just think that they both are significant in terms of playing the type of defense that we desire.

**Q. How would you characterize the play of Slay? He only played about 50% of the snaps last week.**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, it's been solid at times. Certainly he's left a few plays out there. I think that's not only reflective of him but the collective, starting first and foremost with myself.

**Q. How does that happen and who is maybe in charge of making sure you got 11 out there?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Echols was in for Slay. Echols thought they were going for one. I think he came off the field because he's not on field goal block and weren't able to get the transitional component of that. That happens from time to time when you're rolling a lot of people. You never like it.

But the reality is the more people you play the more complex rotations are, particularly whether or not rotations get abnormal.

**Q. When you look at the lack of turnovers, is it more teams maybe just being careful with the ball or you guys simply missing opportunities?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I would imagine teams are working to be careful with the ball. I know we work to be careful with the ball. Sometimes it's just not taking advantage of opportunities. I know we probably dropped three offensive coordinator four balls against Cleveland for example. And there is a price to pay when you miss opportunities.

So it's not only about producing opportunities, but it's about taking advantage of them. We hadn't done that. Been some balls on the ground that we weren't able to recover. So just going to keep working. We feel really good about our values regarding our turnover culture, the things that we tangibly do, physical labor that we do week in and week out. Not in the reactionary way relative to the fact that we're not getting turnovers right now, no. It's just a component of our everyday business.

It has and will continue to be, because we value that component of play. Not getting the fruit of that labor but we

are committed to continuing to work.

**Q. Mike, in the past two games you guys have played (indiscernible) what do you guys have to do to take away primary reads more consistently and how do you correct what you guys have been doing?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, there is a lot of answers to that to be honest with you. None of it is earth shattering or interesting. You change up schematics, play man, play bogus zones, all of which we do.

We just hadn't been doing it well enough to minimize what you discussed. So we are going to keep working.

**Q. ...recent play in the secondary or more likely to pursue a trade for some secondary help?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think we're always open for business, particularly as we get close to the trade deadline. We're always buyers. We are always trying to position ourself to be the best we can be this year.

But that not only applies to the secondary that you asked about, I'm sure that applies to all three phases of the game.

**Q. Guys signed (indiscernible) a year ago. How does he look different on tape than in New York?**

MIKE TOMLIN: He's at the sticks of a really good offense. They're running the ball. Taking care of it. He's got some eligibles that have been together.

He just looks really comfortable in the structured system, and it's going really well for him.

**Q. How are you finding the implementation and the came occasion of the coaches of the expedited review process?**

MIKE TOMLIN: It has been a nonissue.

**Q. There is reports of you guys worked out Valdes-Scandling yesterday. Can you speak to that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We are also working out Vonn Bell and Eddie Jackson today. It's just a normal procedure for us on Monday and Tuesday, like it is for the other 31 teams. We will continue evaluate what's out there and how we can potentially be better.

If we sign him, you'll hear about it.

**Q. How has Spencer grown as an extra offensive lineman of he has to fill in for Isaac?**

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MIKE TOMLIN: We have no reserves about his ability to perform and perform at a starter level. He's done it in the past. That's why we work to be inclusive regarding his participation. He's done some awesome things as an offensive lineman, reporting eligible, and so excited for him if Isaac a not able and he gets an opportunity.

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