

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Teryl Austin

Weekday Press Conference



TERYL AUSTIN: -- we've just had one day with him. Obviously he's kept himself in pretty good shape. You see him running around. Where that leads at the end of the week, I won't know until we get to the end of the week.

Q. How about James Pierre, what kind of growth have you seen in him from the time he was a rookie until now?

TERYL AUSTIN: He's a true pro. I remember James was a COVID guy. Got here, just got him in camp. All he did when he got here, he'd make a play, make a play. We tried to elevate him earlier, he struggled a little bit.

Because of the way he works and the way he approaches things, man, that wasn't a setback for him. I think that's why you see when we put him into games now as a veteran, he's really being able to be impactful for us. We don't really miss a beat.

It's good to see that with him. It's really a good lesson for all young players, that you're never defined by what happens early in your career. Just depends on how you work and how you approach things, that you can turn things around and be a really productive guy and play a lot of years in this league.

Q. Where could you see him fitting in? How is his skill set fitting with this group in the future?

TERYL AUSTIN: Oh, he's got a skill set obviously. We've seen that on tape. He can run. Has ball skills. He has all the natural movements that a corner does. I would think he would fit in here in terms of the amount of single high that we play, being able to guard people.

Again, we'll let that thing take its course and we'll see where it takes us.

Q. How do you feel your defense is better equipped to handle the Bengals' offense?

TERYL AUSTIN: I just think we obviously didn't play very well that day. Every day's a single day. Every game takes on its own life.

But I think we've got a little bit more stability in the back end in terms of how we're playing people and where they are. So you need that against a group like this. They're dynamic. They got obviously the receivers. They got a good tight end. They got a running back that can run and catch. They attack you from all angles.

I just think us being a little bit more stable in terms of substitution, who's in, who's out, will help us hopefully play a little better this time.

Q. What have you seen from them offensively over the last two weeks?

TERYL AUSTIN: Obviously Joe is getting more comfortable. We saw him, they signed him, I don't know when it was, Wednesday or whatever, he played at Green Bay, plays us on a short week Thursday.

You can see that he's more familiar with the guys. The quarterback-receiver thing, it's a lot of times getting used to guys, how they run their routes. You can see him getting more comfortable in that regard.

You can see him in terms of the scheme knowing when to get rid of the ball, check it down, do all those things. I think that just comes the more they play. You kind of see that he's a lot more comfortable in there. He's getting the ball to the right guys. They're making plays for him.

Q. (Indiscernible) primarily on outside guy or capable of playing in the slot?

TERYL AUSTIN: Right now we're just working on him outside.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, the goal is to not let the run game get going. But if it does, we'll have a different mindset maybe in terms of how we recalibrate. Obviously what I did the first time didn't work. I think we'll be better prepared



for it.

Obviously we won't know till we get out there on Sunday. I don't think it will take us by surprise because they've been running the ball more efficiently and more often than the last three or four weeks.

Q. When a guy gets rid of the ball as quick as Joe does, do you have to adjust, pressure less?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think you have to mix it up. There are times when he is going to hold the ball and get it out. There are a lot of times he gets it out fast. He gets it out fast because he knows where to go with it.

When you sign a veteran quarterback that's been around, he can see things. Sometimes with a younger quarterback, they may hold it till they confirm what they see. This guy sees it faster, so he gets rid of it faster.

We just got to mix it up. Obviously you can't go in a game without pressuring a guy and making him feel some heat. But you got to be judicious with it.

Q. Back to the question about the running game. How is it a different challenge to stop the run against a team like the Bengals that spread you out?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, it makes it tough. It makes it tough on the guys up front in terms of being able to control 'em, win the line of scrimmage, get off blocks, make plays. I think a lot of things, when you look at big runs, sure, they got through the first level, but we didn't do a good job in terms of corralling it, getting it down either with our post safety or getting it down when it bounced down outside to the corners and keeping it inside. We have to do a better job of team run defense.

When you talk about it, there are things where it gets through the first level. Those first-level breaks shouldn't end up being 27- and 37-yard runs.

Q. How do you strike a balance of creating turnovers but not relying so much on them?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, I mean, we always rely on turnovers because turnovers change the game. We're never going to shy away from that. We just got to continue to play good, sound defense. The turnovers will come. They'll keep going.

If we get 'em, we get 'em. We know how they affect a game. If we don't, we need to play solid enough defense to still give our offense an opportunity to win it, which means we got to do better on third down, get off the field,

give our offense more opportunities.

Q. Cam is going to move into second of all time of games played for the Steelers. What does that say about his longevity with the team?

TERYL AUSTIN: It's unbelievable. He's a unicorn, to be as elderly as he is (laughter), to play as well as he's playing. I think it's really a testament to him and his work ethic and the things that he does to stay prepared and engaged.

When you're around him, he's almost like a 24-year-old new guy in the building. He really enjoys football, he enjoys being around the guys.

He works his tail off. I mean, it is really a testament to him and what he's put into this game, that he's able to reach those heights and play as long as he has and still play as well as he has.

Q. How much more of a challenge is it to play a team like Cincinnati, played them once already, from a preparation standpoint? What kind of a challenge does that present?

TERYL AUSTIN: It's no different than any other team. We have the film that we look at. Obviously it helps because they're a division rival, so we've seen them quite a bit. As Mike likes to say, it's chess, not checkers. We'll just make the adjustments and see how we can do it.

I don't think it makes it any more difficult one way or the other, or any easier one way or the other. It's just a normal game to prepare for and you try to do the things you have to do to try to win it.

Q. You have a pretty competitive group of defensive backs. Do you get the sense potentially they're looking forward to getting another shot at these two receivers?

TERYL AUSTIN: I would think. I would think our team is. Forget the defensive backs. I think our team defense is looking for an opportunity to play well.

It doesn't matter whether the last time... The bottom line is, we need to play well this week to try to win the game. What happened last time means nothing. How can we play well this week?

I think that's really our focus, and has been our focus in our room, is to try to make sure each week we play better and give ourselves an opportunity to win.



Q. (Question about Echols.)

TERYL AUSTIN: It's like anything, you can't say what's going to happen next week or whatever.

He works his tail off. I don't worry about when I'm talking about Brandin. He works his tail off. I think he's going to have more good days than bad days, however you want to phrase it. I believe in him in terms of how he plays and prepares and being productive.

Again, with Jalen back there, moving forward, which is kind of what we're doing right now, I like the way we're trending. I think last week we had the one big pass that we really had an opportunity to make an interception on that we didn't. Other than that, I thought we were much more sound.

You could feel the cohesion start to come together in that group. I just think that will continue to grow that way in the back end.

Q. (Question about Kyle Dugger.)

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I think he'll continue to grow, just like anybody else. He's a veteran. Real similar to what I talked about with Joe Flacco on the other side in terms of being in a team, being able to see it, how things move, being able to adapt and feel more comfortable in his position.

I think KD is doing the same thing.

Q. What has allowed you to be (indiscernible) in coverage the last couple weeks? How important is that when you're going up against this team this week?

TERYL AUSTIN: It's super important. What's helped us, we just go approach each week as, Hey, how can we get better this week? What do we got to do to get better in terms of our drill work, in terms of our technique, all those different things? I think that's why as we keep going, our coverage will continue to get better.

I believe the cohesion of the group helps that. We're not waiting on a call. We're not doing this. Hey, everybody's got a real good feel about what's going on. It allows you to play faster and freer in that regard, without wondering, What's going on behind me?

I think that's part of the coverage thing that's really been helpful.

Q. What do you think helped that ramp-up happen in the past couple of weeks?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think once we solidified it, obviously 5 is such a good player, you can play him anywhere. But for the overall benefit of the team, he moved to safety. I think it's showing.

Q. Do you think PQ has taken the next step forward?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think he has. I think he's played well. He'll tell you, he's pretty critical of himself in that regard. He'll tell you he's not where he wants to be.

He's a really good player. He keeps getting better. I just assume he'll continue to grow and be really impactful for us.

I really like the way he's kind of taken charge of the group in terms of being the quarterback, because he calls plays, he talks all the stuff, he makes all the checks. It's really good. He's done an outstanding job.

Q. As you talk about that cohesion, do you think at times the defense has over-thought it instead of just going out and reacting?

TERYL AUSTIN: No. I mean, I think that's always a simple thing: Well, we're thinking too much.

No, you have to be able to think and play in this business. I mean, there's one thing to be in college where you recruit a lot, have guys that are just better than the other team, you maybe can roll the ball out. We're all picking from the same group of guys. They're all really good players.

How do you help them get better? Sometimes you got to be able to learn and take the things that you learn and take those on the field.

We'll be detailed and we'll have some things schematically to help people. But to say just simplifying it and being more simple helps, I don't think that's a fair statement.

I think we can have it all.

Q. Is there anything with the missed tackles that you've been able to pinpoint?

TERYL AUSTIN: No. Missed tackles, when you look at missed tackles, you watch 'em, it usually starts with your initial angle. Then it starts with making sure you get your feet on top of the ball carrier, having your eyes in the right place. 'Cause when you watch it, when guys miss tackles, they overrun it, got their eyes in the wrong place, they're seeing it wrong.



I don't question our guys' willingness to tackle. That's why we'll get better and we'll continue to work at it to try to get better and get our guys in the right positions. That's what I see.

It's a battle you fight all year in terms of trying to make sure you tackle well all year, especially once you take the pads off at this point in the season.

Q. How do you feel that Harrison played the last game? One particular play, 11-yard run, seems both T.J. and Harrison both tried to set the edge.

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I wouldn't blame that on Malik. Malik played well. He did some really good things. He's stout in the run game. When he hits people, he kind of stops people.

The play you're talking about, it was not a one-man screw-up. We had a whole bunch of stuff that was going on in that play.

But if you're asking about Malik, I thought Malik gave us a nice change of pace in terms of getting back and being stout in there.

Moving forward, I think he'll continue to get better as he grows. He got injured in the first game. We just got him back. I think he'll continue to get better and be what we want when we signed him, which is to be the first- or second-down run stop guy, give you flexibility rushing off the edge, give you good blitzes versus the back. That's what I see him moving forward.

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