

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Teryl Austin

Weekday Press Conference



Q. Who's responsible for covering the quarterbacks Sunday?

TERYL AUSTIN: All of us. It's going to be an all-day job, rush coverage, being able to plaster, giving guys time to get there, knowing when you can come out of coverage and get them. Everybody is going to be involved.

Q. How about when he goes out in routes?

TERYL AUSTIN: The quarterback when he goes out in routes? We'll handle that. That's not an everyday thing.

Q. What do you see differently from Sunday's game from last time you played Cincinnati?

TERYL AUSTIN: I just think we've been playing more consistently the last few weeks. I thought that the thing we are doing is keeping a lot of those big plays off of us, the field-flipping plays. I think that was a good thing that we did. In the first game we didn't do a good job of that, so this game we did it, and we have been doing it, and that's why I think we've been having an uptick in performance.

We've still got a long ways to go, but I think that's just it, the lack of explosives and being able to be solid in the run game has given us an opportunity to play more consistently the last few weeks.

Q. The Bears have the second highest explosive run rate in the NFL right now. What do you have to do particularly to stop what they do well?

TERYL AUSTIN: You've got to play good team defense. You've got to make sure we're really good up front in terms of controlling the line of scrimmage, our backers got to really do a good job of playing downhill, the DBs are involved because everybody is involved in this run game, and if you don't, they're going to find a way to get the running back on a corner and see if they can make that a win for them.

So everybody is involved in the run game, but it really starts up front with our guys controlling the line of scrimmage, our backers coming downhill, and then the secondary doing a good job in terms of fitting gaps and closing it off.

Q. Sawyer has kind of figured some things out; are you finding yourself more willing to use that three-outside linebacker look with or without Alex's help, and if so, do you have sort of a line in your head as to what's too much so it still stays fresh and it keeps offenses off guard?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, he has grown. Jack has grown. We like Jack. He allows us to do some things. Alex is down right now so we're not out of a package. What constitutes limits? I think the game constitutes how much we use it or not. It's all game driven, how we're doing it. How we're doing in that particular package is how much we'll use it.

Pleased with his progress and how he's doing it and staying in that formation or staying in that grouping depends on how we're playing in that grouping.

Q. Is Nick's ability to rush on the inside sort of the hub of what makes that possible?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, I think Nick can rush from anywhere. He can be, if he gets the space needed, he can really be a hard block for guys inside because of his quickness. So that is one thing that is attractive about that package. But we also like Nick rushing outside, and I think that package gives us the flexibility to deploy him anywhere.

Q. How frustrating is it to see a guy like Cory Trice just can't seem to get healthy enough to contribute?

TERYL AUSTIN: It stinks for him. He's such a great young man. He works his tail off. He was always here just working. He's had a setback his first year, and he came back. It just stinks to see a guy that pours so much into it not have an opportunity to get out on the field and have some success because he was working that way, he was trending that way, and injuries just set him back. But that's

kind of the nature of our business. Sometimes there's a lot of guys that are really good and talented and have the ability to play in this league that don't make it because of injuries. I think he's just been set back, and he's in here working already, trying to plot his next comeback, and I applaud him for it because I know he'll make it.

Q. Ramsey has talked about moving to safety kind of reinvigorated him because he likes tackling, a new challenge, learning a new position. How have you seen his learning style and mental approach as he shifts to this new role?

TERYL AUSTIN: It's awesome. His learning style and approach doesn't change. That's how he was when he first got here because obviously everybody knows we didn't get him until after all the OTAs were done and got him basically just before camp. But his learning process is really good, so he just takes what he does and how he does it and moves it to a new position.

That's why he's had the success he's had, because he's a good player. He knows how to study, how to apply the things that are being taught in the meetings and take them on the field.

Q. What are some of the ripple effects that you're feeling with him now at safety and utilizing him in a different way?

TERYL AUSTIN: When you say "ripple effects," what do you mean by ripple effects?

Q. I meaning like in terms of the types of coverages that you might be using or ways that you're playing as a whole defensively with him in a different spot.

TERYL AUSTIN: I think what it's done is there's not so much in terms of what we do differently coverage-wise, it's just we're able to streamline some things in terms of guys being in position, in terms of -- in this grouping he's at nickel, in this grouping he's at safety, and in this grouping he's at corner. We have less of that, and although he's really good at all those positions, it helps everybody else with him being in one position and they're able to concentrate on their position and do that.

I think that's more of the ripple effect, if you want to say, that guys are getting -- like I said before, we're getting a little bit more continuity in that back end and guys are getting used to working with people in the same positions, and the communication and all the things that go into that is really steady. You're not hearing it from a different guy. You might be saying the same things, but sometimes when you hear it from a certain guy, it rings.

That's always, I think, been a good part and parcel for us keeping him in one spot.

Q. Is there a common trait in the way that guys are wired that make them successful in moving from corner to safety later in their careers?

TERYL AUSTIN: I'm going to assume the common trait is that they're just -- most of the time when you have guys that are able to move and switch positions, they're just good football players, and they'd be good football players no matter where you put them. I would bet at this point if you moved him to receiver, he'd probably be a pretty good receiver, just because good football players are good football players. To me the common trait is they understand the game, they study, they work at their craft, and they're always trying to get better, and that's why guys have success when they move positions.

Q. The past three weeks you've had a lot of games where you've had a lot of two high, then you go into single high, then you go back to two high. What's been the catalyst for constantly changing things up, and do you feel like that's given you an advantage over the past three weeks as you've been trending?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I think being able to be flexible in what we do and how we stop people is important. If I'm an offensive coordinator and I say, hey, listen, I could book these guys for this every time, they'll be able to devise plays to get into the type of situations they want to get into, and then it just becomes a, my guy might be better than yours on this play.

But I think if we can and I can continue to mix it up and not give them something that they can just, okay, hey, this is what we have, that gives us an advantage because I stand up here, and I've said it before, I think we have good players, so that allows them to play and not play at a disadvantage.

I've got to continue to try to do my best for our guys to get them in the best positions so they can perform.

Q. Mike said Tuesday that Slay is going to get the job back when he's healthy. How do you keep James Pierre involved, and how do you balance Slay's resume versus the way Pierre has been playing lately in this opportunity?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I think obviously J.P. has done a heck of a job when he's stepped in for Slay, and he's done that. He's been around. He's done that before. But I think, again, when you have Slay, we have some veteran

experience.

I think what we'll do is we'll see how that works out, and in terms of where we want to utilize J.P. because I think he's earned the right to be on the field, and we'll just go from there.

Q. You said Pierre has been in these shoes before, but I feel like he's played better this time than in his previous opportunities. Where have you seen him improve?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I think, one, it's not surprising. The way James worked, he's always been that way. If you guys remember, he was a COVID baby. We didn't see James until he got here during the COVID year at camp, and all he did when he got here was he just made a play daily in camp and then we kept him and he was one of the few guys as a free agent that made a roster that year.

So the way he's worked and prepared himself, I think each year he's gotten better. So that's why in his sixth or seventh year he's playing a lot better in terms of when he does get an opportunity, and I think a lot of that is time on task and the way the guy works and the way he prepares, and that's why he's having some success.

Q. Can you talk about how the defensive line is playing, specifically Harmon and Black?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think those young guys are playing well. I think our defensive line is playing well. As you know, really for us, it all starts up front and how those big guys control the game because that's what this game is, it's a big man's game, and I think those young guys are continually getting better. Like any young person or young player, they're going to have days that maybe aren't as good or as great as maybe others, but in terms of their advancement and how they're developing, I'm very pleased with those guys.

Q. Last year you guys struggled to stop run offenses that had a running-threat quarterback. What are you guys doing to handle that better this season than you were this time last year?

TERYL AUSTIN: Again, I'm only thinking about this game and how we handle these people this week. But part of the things we talked about in the off-season was making sure we got a little more stout up front, a little bigger, a little more athletic up front, and that was one of the things we did, because we wanted to be able to combat these type of teams that had dual-threat quarterbacks and dynamic running attacks.

We're going to find out how far we've come.

Q. Is the magic word "plaster" this week?

TERYL AUSTIN: There's quite a few magic words, but that would be one of them (laughing). This guy, he's an escape artist. He does a really good job of buying extra time, moving around the pocket. If you give him open windows he's going to get the ball down the field. If you give him a wide-open lane he's going to take it and run it, and he is, he's dynamic. Just a young player on the rise.

We are, we're going to have to do a great job of plastering him. We're going to have to do a good job in terms of our rush lanes and try to make sure we keep him bottled up because when he gets outside the pocket, then that's usually when bad things happen as a defense.

Q. Is there a point in the year where the rookies maybe stop being rookies? Are we there? And how do you as evaluators look at them?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I think there's always a sign, but to me it's always predicated on the guy itself. We don't say, okay, it's week 12, you're no longer rookies. I think a lot of it depends on the individual, how much he's played, how much he's seen because you can give them all the scenarios you want, but until you get in that scenario and have to react in that scenario, we don't know what you're going to do.

But they are, the young guys that we drafted, all three of those young guys are playing a lot of good football for us, and I anticipate they'll just continue to get better. But I still think they're good. I think they're growing. But I obviously think their best football is ahead of them.

Q. There's been a lot of talk about how kind of offenses are making defenses respond via their personnel, whether they go 12, 13, 21, different things. There's a lot of talk about maybe instead of responding to their personnel, you should respond to the situation, down and distance. What's your thought on that process, and what do you utilize to decide how you're going to respond to an offense?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think when you watch the tape with each team, it'll tell you how to respond. Because there are certain teams that work on down and distance and the personnel doesn't matter, and there are certain teams that the personnel absolutely matters what's in the game. So I think that's always a game-by-game thing. So we always look at the tape and then we decide what our response will be usually based on that.

