

# 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. Certainly was a physical football game and attrition was of component of it. I guess a component of reviewing it is talk about some of that as we lead into this week.

Calvin Anderson at tackle can be characterized as out again this week with his knee. Certainly we have several guys in the concussion protocol. We'll let that process run its course and the medical experts will be center stage in determining availability of those guys.

Those guys are Pete, Malik Harrison, Darnell Washington. We have some other guys who got banged up during the course of play. Keeanu Benton had an ankle. He was able to go back and finish. I'm sure that will limit him some at the early portions of this week.

James Pierre suffered a calf injury. He was able to finish but could impact him at the early portions of this week. Ben Skowronek, Yahya Black, and some others.

Kyle Dugger has a chance to come back this week from his hand injury, and the rest are bumps and bruises associated with play.

Thankful that we have an additional 24 hours or so or plus this week. That's why we adjusted our schedules in the way that we've done. Sometimes when we play on Monday, particularly at the early stages of team development, we'll do Friday twice and hit a lot of or situational football and really get solid on some of that stuff.

We just deemed it appropriate to give ourselves another additional 24 hours of recovery this week, and so that's why we've taken the approach that we've taken this week.

Thursday will be like a normal in-season Wednesday and then we'll proceed from there. Hopefully we'll get better clarity regarding some player availability. We'll give guys some additional time to rest and recuperate and be able to put their hand in the pile in terms of participating in the

process of the game readiness, and certainly it's important this time of year that we have that as the road gets narrow.

Things that I thought were significant in terms of determining the outcome of the game on Sunday. I thought we were aggressive schematically on offense, and beyond that, though, we had the play making to go along with it. We were aggressive down in the grass in some instances. I thought DK obviously was a central component of that, but so was guys like Calvin Austin.

That was a big third down and three down in the grass in the third quarter for him. And really was a whisker away from going 75 or so.

We were able to hit Jaylen Warren out of the backfield versus some pressure on the third down play, and he was able to run it in from about roughly 40 yards out. So we got some yards in chunks. That certainly aids execution. It flips the field, and oftentimes chunk plays are the central component of scoring drives, and certainly it was for us.

We were able to put seven points on the board our first possession of the game, we were able to put three points I think on the board the first possession of the second half, and kind of go on from there.

From a defensive perspective, I thought our third down play particularly at the early stages of the game sent a message in quelled the environment and allowed us to find our footing in play.

Brandin Echols I thought was central to that. He broke up a pass in the red zone early in the game; made them settle for three on the first possession. He had a sack on the next third down on a subsequent drive. He had a third down coverage play I think on the next down.

Largely we did what we needed to do on third down in the first half of the game, and I thought it really set the stage for game on, if you will.

We had a stop there at the end of the half, but we were penalized and that was a full point penalty. They were able to go in and score a couple plays later, and also minimized our opportunity to maybe go back at them in a two-minute

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drill prior to the half.

So certainly that was a costly penalty.

Largely I thought third down in the first half really set the stage from a competition standpoint, from a defensive perspective, and then certainly in the second half, standing up on the short field was big; making them settle for three or getting off. I just think this time of year that's where the game is played for offenses and for defenses.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention special teams. I thought we had some timely play making in that space. Ben Skowronek and Carson Bruener, man, really were productive. We talk about activity and productivity and it being a difference. Those two have been highly productive at whooping blocks and making tackles in that space with a high level of consistency, and it was needed as you battle for blades of grass in the field position game in games like that.

Largely though I liked everyone's smiling-in-the-face-of-adversity mentality. The environment was a tough and competitive one. Certainly the Ravens are a worthy dance partner, and we were able to get the job done.

Now as we lean in on Monday Night Football. This week we're excited about Monday Night Football at Acrisure. Certainly the Dolphins are as high as any team in the NFL. I will first with their defense first. If you look at these guys statistically over the last five weeks, man, they're tops in football. I think they're giving up 13.2 points per game over that span; third down conversion rate is like at 31 percent.

They got nine turnovers. I think that's second in football. So some of the very critical statistics that measure how you're playing, they're checking those boxes. That's why they've been the winners of four straight. When you keep the point total down, you take the ball away, you're good on third down, I think they're 22 percent TD rate in the red zone, so stingy in that area as well. They're doing all the things you need to do to play really good defense.

I love the linebacker tandem. Both highly productive instinct football players, volume tacklers. You better get habits on those guys if you to make plays not only in the running game but in the perimeter game, et cetera.

Very active tandem. They leave them on the field quite a bit. They don't go to dime on third down and things of that nature like a lot of teams do this time of year.

20 and 25 are going to be in the middle of everything. I think they been really solid in the secondary once they

solidified some of their division of labor. Minkah has been significant in that regard. He's been playing nickel for them and they got more depth certainly at safety than at corner.

Minkah's versatility has been an asset to them. He's done an awesome job as a guy that plays closer to the line of scrimmage in the nickel position, a guy that blitzes. Certainly in base he plays free safety and is a hub of communication and center fielder for them back there.

They got two really good solid veteran corners who do a nice job of keeping things in front of them. They're very aware and instinct players. Raul has been around a long time; Jones has been around a long time now. They're ball guys. You see it. They've taken the ball away. They hunt the ball via the turnovers and punching in the collective is really impressive.

Really impressed by Bradley Chubb's efforts. I think he missed a significant amount of time over the last year or two. He certainly appears to have found his footing. He's a challenge for us in terms of the edge rush, particularly with some instability that we have at tackle. It's going to be a challenge minimizing his impact on the game.

But Chop is a designated rusher, Judon. They've got a quality edge group, and certainly they got some capable guys inside as well.

On the offensive side of the ball, can't say enough about Achane and their running game and how they been playing behind that over the course of that the last month or so when they been on that win streak.

Even last week with Wright they were able to do similar things that they've done. They've really anchored down and established a personality there.

The offensive line is running off the ball. Certainly capable of attacking you vertically down the field. Still, Waddle is a dangerous guy. He's capable of going over the top, capable of run after.

Waller, in particular in the red zone, is a force to be reckoned with. Big bodied guy. Good along the end line and so forth in that space. He's certainly been an asset to them certainly over the second half of the year since his acquisition and activation. Been a central component of what they do.

They utilize a lot of people. They utilize a lot of personnel groups that work to keep you off balance that way, they got a veteran offensive staff. Know a lot of guys on the offensive side of the ball, so certainly we'll be utilizing the additional time to prepare ourselves not only strategically,



but also just getting really familiar with their personnel. It's been a number of years since we've seen these guys, and certainly I will take the additional day to get familiar with that component of the matchup as well.

I'll pause and open up for questions.

**Q. Mike, you didn't mention Derrick Harmon. Is he ready to go? And two, Yahya Black, where is he in his...**

MIKE TOMLIN: Yes. Derrick Harmon will be limited at the early portions of the week, and we'll let the amount of participation and how quickly it picks up and the quality of that participation as we go through the week to determine whether or not he's available. Certainly excited about additional day as it person pertains to him.

Yahya has gotten better through the process. Sometimes as I often say, one man's misfortune is another man's opportunity. We have certainly absorbed some attrition in the front with guys like Dean Lowry and Loudermilk going on IR; Derrick Harmon having two separate injuries.

So Yahya has been a guy that's really taken advantage of the opportunities not only in terms of his play, but just general growth associated with gaining in-snap experience.

I think it's reasonable to expect him to continue to get better. He brings a good attitude. He is getting better from a production standpoint, and I just think last Sunday was a reflection of that.

**Q. Mike, the numbers you guys have against the run when Harmon is in versus whenever he's not in there are pretty -- 100 yard difference per game. What does Derrick do so well that helps you guys defend the run?**

MIKE TOMLIN: He's a first rounder. That's why you draft first rounders. He's really talented, but, you know, it's not a one-man gang, certainly. I knew we were in for a tough run day last week when Malik went down. Because that's also a component of his job description in terms of being a nine on seven, stopping type linebacker for us.

It's never a one-man discussion. Usually it's a multiple-man discussion. Certainly Harmon is an asset to us in that space.

**Q. You mentioned Minkah. How do you feel like you guys have done in terms of replacing him not only schematically but leadership-wise?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't think we're devoid of leadership by any means. Certainly we've gone through some

adjustments schematically in terms of how we divide the labor up, but it's not exclusive to him.

I think the loss of D Elliott has been a major component of that as well. Guys like Miles Killebrew. It's just the attrition component associated with football. But at the same time that's why we're really excited about having Jalen Ramsey with his position flexibility, ability to play outside corner and nickel and safety. We envision that being a big time asset in terms of keeping people off balance.

And from a matchup standpoint, in recent weeks and I guess you could say month and some change, we haven't been afforded that because of some of the other things I mentioned. We're thankful he's been rock solid for us at safety as well.

**Q. (Regarding DK?)**

MIKE TOMLIN: He's moving in the right direction. I don't think he's going to jeopardize his availability at all but it certainly may jeopardize his availability at the early portions of the week from a practice standpoint. Thankfully, he's fine. I'm appreciative of our medical staff and how quickly they acted in making sure he was safe and taking care of him postgame.

**Q. Talk about some of the explosive plays you were able to create in the passing game. What do you need to do from either a game plan or execution standpoint to replicate some of that going forward?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Both. It's a mentality thing, particularly as the road gets narrow, but also the schematics are a component of it.

We knew we would have opportunities. We just been in those circumstances with Baltimore so many times over the years. I am in the process of getting familiar with Miami and what that might look like this week.

**Q. Mike, what was the impact that Dylan and MVS had on the receiving corps?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, just veteran guys, been-there-done-that guys. As I mentioned, as the road gets narrow in December it's good to have those guys in the fold, guys that have experience in rising up in those moments.

Certainly statistics might not bear it out, but I thought they were an asset to us, and it's reasonable to expect that to improve and increase as we continue.

**Q. Mike, the week after losing by 15 plus**

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**(indiscernible) is really good. Why do you think you guys have been consistently able to respond after a really rough patch?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I just think that's what this business is about. It's week to week. There are going to be good weeks, and you can't wear your hand out patting yourself on the back when you have those good weeks and you certainly can't hate yourself when you have the negative weeks.

As a leader I think it's important that I show that steady presence, to provide that confidence, if you will, for the collective.

**Q. Mike, is that something you've always done, dating back to your early days as a coach, or is that something you had to learn and adjust?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I just think I understand my role as a leader: To be what my guys need me to be. Certainly when you're coming off a negative performance they need stability and belief.

You always say what gives me confidence and I tell you life, ditto.

**Q. One thing that Jonnu said yesterday having played with Miami last year, he said they're particularly good at getting their fast backs in space. From your standpoint, how do they do that? How do they manage that? From your run game defense standpoint, how do you combat that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: They're really good with personnel groups. They'll go pony backs or two running backs in the game. They got a lot of presnap shifts and motions. They personnel you a lot. So with some of those presnap movements they gain an advantage on the edge from time to time.

They really do a nice job schematically, but as you mentioned, those running backs are dynamic. They're all -- couple of them are sub-4.4. You certainly see that in video.

**Q. (Regarding Alex Highsmith) ...and playing the horizontal kind of football he did on the jet sweep and...**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, that's why we like stand-up edge players that feel the vision. Feel for the game is broader than D-ends and some of the things you mentioned. I think it's reflective of that. That's not only characteristic of him but it's characteristic of all our edge

guides. TJ, Herb, Jack Sawyer. That's the benefit to me of being a hybrid or a stand-up edge group.

**Q. Going back to your wide receivers, what went into the decision to have Roman down versus Scotty being active?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Scotty is a capable backup punt returner, and I thought that was the difference.

**Q. In terms of Skowronek and special teams, a unique individual. We saw some of those where he was getting destroyed on the (indiscernible). Did you notice that from him?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Certainly I noticed it. He's a football player first and receiver second. He has an appetite and thirst for the competition the way that Darrius Heyward-Bay did when he was here. And certainly we're appreciative of not only his efforts but also as I mentioned his production.

**Q. Does that say something that DK basically volunteered himself to then go in and fill in late? As a coach when you have a guy that's as valuable in other areas of your team as that, was there any like, wait, what's (indiscernible) doing out there?**

MIKE TOMLIN: No. I just think that's what time of year it is, what type of game it was. I'm thankful for his efforts, but he wasn't the only one. Jaylen Warren for example returned kicks in the game. The road's getting narrow. It's AFC North football, et cetera. There are a lot of reasons why that type of attitude and approach was required.

**Q. DK said it felt different last week to practice. The details were different. What do you do as a coach to get that out of them at this point of the season?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think we're always working to improve our process and thus our play. Certainly as you get into December it's reasonable to expect your process to be cleaner, to continually elevate the floor in an effort to do so relative to your play.

**Q. Mike, you guys haven't been able to run the ball recently. What do you guys have to do better to get that going? Do you see any availability from the passing game (indiscernible.)**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, I'm comfortable with our approach to running the football. Certainly we haven't gotten what we want from a production standpoint. There is a lot of layers to that discussion.

I thought particularly last week the loss of Darnell in-game

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was significant in that regard, Pete at tackle. But that's just football. You adapt. You keep moving. Things are going to be less than ideal at times, particularly during this stage of the journey.

I'm excited about putting together a good and complete plan in an effort to do so this week.

**Q. (Indiscernible) leads in yards allowed since he's been in the starting lineup. Can you, explain how a guy goes from on couch at the beginning of last season to six years into his career somehow one of the best in the league?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, it's him. Ask any of his teammates. He has unwavering belief in himself. He's unbelievable professional. He's tough minded. His physically tough.

He's willing to do anything and everything. He's earned everything he's gotten in this business. As I mentioned in this setting before, he was an undrafted college free agent in the COVID year. So, man, the tough road is not something that's new to him.

I just think that he's played it up mentally and I just think it's an asset to him and us.

**Q. Mike you did the Discount Double Check celebration after Aaron did. What's it like seeing him, A, have that rushing touchdown, have that celebration in 2025? Did you know he still had wheels like that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't want to make more out of it than should be. It's just fun. We went down the field and scored on the opening drive in a hostile environment and that's what it was about.

**Q. Had one of his best games of the season on Sunday. Was there any indication in practice leading up to that? What do you think was the difference for him?**

MIKE TOMLIN: As I mentioned before, you do business with a guy like Aaron for environments like that in this time of year. He's a been-there-done-that guy. His resume reflects that. Beyond his resume, he's a competitor and he's not running from it, he's running to it.

Certainly that was a big game, so I'm not surprised by big things from him.

**Q. Had a third and moderate, was third and five to Calvin Austin in the second half and the 31-yarder down the sideline. Were you hunting for anymore of those in the fourth quarter that just didn't manifest on**

**those three possessions?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know if I'm going to tell you my intentions. We have to play that group again here in a couple weeks.

**Q. Can you do the things you like to do with Darnell Washington in the game with other people, or is he so unique you kind of have to scratch some of that stuff?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You certainly can, but there are weight classes in combat sports for a reason. You know, he's significantly bigger than others that you replace him with. Sometimes that's the difference.

**Q. Mike, you guys are 0-4 in games that kickoff at 4:25 or later. Any explanation to that our how do you break that streak?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I make no excuse.

**Q. Mike, you've had Dylan Cook for three or four years. How do you they he handled his opportunity, and what's the comfort level if he is your guy going forward?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You're excited for a guy when he gets an opportunity to play. He's certainly worked hard and has been professional. I loved his mindset when he went in. Happy for him. Oftentimes one man's misfortune is another man's opportunity. He may get another opportunity this week. See where the week leads us.

**Q. Mike, I think it's the third time in the last four, five years that you guys have beaten the Ravens when they've outrushed you by 100 yards or more. What goes into a game plan to mitigate that vast of a difference in the ground game?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, they're built different than a lot of the teams, and so the nature of our matchups are different. You know, you can almost substitute their rushing yards for passing yards and vice versa. Bottom line, you better win the turnover game, better be good in the red area, you better make timely situational plays.

That's kind of the formula for playing guys from a our perspective.

**Q. Mike, you said you understand your role as the head coach when negative things happen. DK after the game said Mike takes a lot bullets four us. 19 years in does taking those bullets get...**

MIKE TOMLIN: It's the job.



**Q. One of those bullets was fans calling for your job. Did you feel that you were in the hot seat at all last week?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, I been in the hot seat for 19 years.

**Q. Did you feel like you had something to prove to the fans at all?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I always feel like I got something to prove. Not necessarily to anyone in particular. That's just the spirit in which I go about what I do professionally.

**Q. What do you expect from the fans Monday night?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I expect them to show up. It's Monday Night Football in Acrisure. It's going to be a big game.

**Q. Can you clarify what happened with DK after the game? We met with him and then all the reports came out last night.**

MIKE TOMLIN: He got hit in the abdomen or stomach in-game. I think they gave him some basic over-the-counter remedies in-game, like Pepto, and it got probably progressively worse after the game.

So appreciative of our medical experts. We just exercised an abundance of precaution. We didn't want to get him in the air without having a complete understanding about what he was dealing with, and they did a good job of that.

**Q. Mike, is there something to Joey's battling back from two penalties early in the game and then helped make a breakup at the end of the game, keeping that sort of resilience in important moments?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Joey is always trying to make plays, and he's certainly, being a Pittsburgh kid, understands the nature the Steelers-Ravens. He always want to be a Raven killer. He has made some plays against those guys in the past. He had a big interception against Odell Beckham as a rookie. He tackled Lamar I think on a two point conversion a year ago. I think that's just how he's wired.

**Q. A lot of what you talked about with Miami's secondary certainly manifested on the stat sheet last week. Going against a 24-year old quarterback; obviously difference from you guys and the veteran leadership you have there. Their aggressiveness, break on the ball, that sort of thing, is that something that is painting a picture throughout the season or was that specific going up against New York last week?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think that's reflective of who they are after they found their footing. Certainly they have absorbed some attrition, particularly at the cornerback position, JuJu Brents and others have been injured. I think they settled into the veteran tandem as I mentioned, solidifying Minkah as a nickel and utilizing their safety depth and getting stability there.

What they've done over the last five weeks is kind of reflective of where they are, but I'll let them speak to that. I'm doing it from an outsider's perspective.

**Q. I'm sure you liked the three step catch from him on Sunday, but in general as a member of the competition committee, do you like that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: It's always been debatable. Seems like I've just learned to kind of move on, to be quite honest with you. I moved on from Jesse James for example. I don't even know what year that was.

There are going to be controversial calls in big games. I think I always focus my energy on making enough plays to minimize that in terms of determining the outcome of the game.

That's why you won't hear me calling New York postgame for explanations and things of that nature. You guys asked me that earlier in the year regarding something. It's not going to change the outcome. I just work to keep moving, and I just like to put together a comprehensive enough plan and make enough plays where the game's outcome doesn't hinge on one play or a couple of plays.

**Q. You have a pretty good feel for what a catch is and what a catch isn't?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I do.

**Q. When you see the results on Sundays, though, when you have to make -- the scoring play is one thing, but is it difficult to -- how do you process information and who do you rely on and say, hey, we should challenge this or not?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I just think that football is so bang-bang and exciting. I think that's why our fans love it. It's a difficult game to play because of the speed. It's a difficult game to officiate. I think as a collective we have some things in place that kind of protect us all in an effort to get things right.

Ruling that catch a touchdown makes it automatically reviewable where I don't have to decide to challenge, et



cetera. So there is a lot of things in place, interrelated variables relative to that discussion.

**Q. Going through four left tackles in three games, what kind of stress does that play on an offense? And does having Isaac there, a veteran, help mitigate that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, I don't know that Isaac is blocking any of those edge guys, but certainly from a communication and coordination perspective his presence is helpful. It's been a challenge, but that's why we work hard at making sure we prepare the collective. It's next-man-up for us, not only at that position but others.

You get a chance to prove that over the course of the journey, and certainly we've been challenged in that space in recent weeks. Can't say enough about those guys. I think we largely kept Aaron clean in-game. It's a credit to those guys.

**Q. Cam is about 70 percent snaps as an interior defensive lineman. At 36 years old those things don't happen in the league maybe ever. How do you explain that, that he's able to do that at this age?**

MIKE TOMLIN: He's an outlier. There are some outliers in every discussion. Guys like he and Calais Campbell for example are outliers.

**Q. Mike, you have a 42 year old quarterback. Can a 44 year old who hasn't played in five years come back and play, Philip Rivers?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I have no idea what you're talking about.

**Q. (Indiscernible.)**

MIKE TOMLIN: That's none of my business, man. I'm trying to get ready for the Dolphins.

**Q. When you talk about Cam, is it fair to say the attrition, that he's played more than you planned on or expected in terms of terms of the snap share?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We do what we got to do. He certainly does what he has to do. Man, he is a quality leader in every way, and I think certainly he understands our collective circumstance at times, and he's always willing to do whatever he needs to do to help us win.

**Q. With the left tackle attrition being what it is, it's forgotten the three linemen from the center out are second year guys. Have they been taking that second year step?**

MIKE TOMLIN: They have and they have in a big way, to be honest with you. I don't really think about it. We invested a lot of draft capital in those guys. I'm not surprised that they're capable players and emerging as individuals and a collective.

I think it's reasonable to expect that to continue.

**Q. Mike, you're probably deeper at linebacker than you have been in quite sometime. How much did that come into play on Sunday?**

MIKE TOMLIN: It was certainly needed. I'm appreciative of Cole Holcomb's contributions. As I mentioned, man, Malik has a certain job description for us. When he went down I thought Cole did a nice job.

But depth is big certainly at the linebacker position. We're continually working not only in terms of the acquisition of players, but the development of players as well. Oftentimes guys make plays in special teams before they make plays on defense. One of the guys I mentioned is a special teams highlight for us, young Carson Bruener. So he's in the hopper as well.

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