

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Coach Mike Tomlin

Weekday Press Conference



As I often say, there is a fine line between being a pro bowler and a backup in this business.

I just see it through that lens. These guys are at the tip-top of the food chain in terms of what they do, and usually one man's misfortune is another man's opportunity. There was certainly examples worthy of recognition. We talked a lot about it last night.

Can't say enough about Dylan and what he was able to do for us at left tackle for example. Kenny Gainwell did an awesome job, like he always does when called upon in an expanded role. Asante getting an opportunity to start and playing a lot of football for us. Guys like Herbig, although he's been called on a lot in the past and certainly has delivered. Guys like he and Jack Sawyer had opportunities to play expanded roles as well.

But it's just -- it comes with this time of year. There is an attrition element to our game. That's why we take everyone's readiness very seriously. We have to call on that again moving forward. Everyone does. And so it's important that you fortify your depth with capable people. We've worked to do that during the course of our journey and continue to get those guys ready because you know it's coming.

It's just good to see some of that happen. We certainly will have some more challenges as we lean in on this week regarding some of those things.

Issac Seumalo got hurt last night. I don't know what his status is as I stand here today. I would imagine he certainly is going to be limited at the early portions of week and see where it leads us.

Same thing could be said for Herbig with his hamstring. See where it leads us. We had some guys that missed the previous game or games and are angling toward getting back. Probably the most favorable of those is Derrick Harmon. He was probably healthy enough to play at the very end of last week, but as a young guy with limited rep opportunities, I didn't think it would be fair to him or for us to put him in uniform.

So he'll have an opportunity to get a complete week's work,

MIKE TOMLIN: Good afternoon. As always, I'll start with a quick round up on our last performance from last night. As I said after the game, you know, I thought we had a clear path to engineering victory. Certainly they had established a certain personality during their four-game win streak. A major component was their run game as I mentioned.

They had averaged about 192 a game over the previous five games and so certainly we had to minimize that. But it's just more than just stopping the run on specific downs per se. It's a collective approach. I thought we did a nice job of minimizing that mode of producing victory for them, not only with the way we played the run but with the way we ran the ball offensively, the way we possessed the ball offensively.

Us being aggressive on fourth down plays, particularly early on, was a strategic component of minimizing their run. Us getting off on third down was a major component defensively of us minimizing their run. They weren't able to get a new set of downs very often and establish the rhythm that produced the 192 per game.

Certainly we thought if we could do that we would position ourselves to maybe take the ball away. Had a big takeaway early on from Samuel and certainly had other opportunities that didn't come to fruition throughout. We needed to take care of the football and we certainly did that.

It wasn't easy sledding there, particularly early, but as we found our rhythm and we were able to get some things going and produce some touchdowns, as the road gets narrow you got to score touchdowns. Field goals don't necessarily get you out of stadiums, particularly as you're battling for playoff position and people are in the same mentality doing similar things.

And so I thought our ability to score touchdowns in the red area was big, was a major component of it as well. Can't say enough about the many contributions we got from people who had an opportunity to have expanded roles.

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go back to his hometown, and play some football. Excited about getting him back. He certainly has been an asset to us particularly in terms of defending and stopping the run, and anticipating what we're going to face this week, man, that will be big.

Some other guys working their way back, Pete is still in the protocol, so we'll let the protocol be our guide in terms of his availability.

James Pierre was limited with a calf last week. See where that leads us.

No new news on TJ. I'm sure I will a little later in the week, but I hadn't heard any new updates regarding his availability or what that looks like as he starts to work his way back to us this week, and so no real news there.

I'm certain that we have a lot of bumps and bruises associated with play. That's the nature of this thing. We will work hard and smart, and sometimes that means being inclusive. So we've probably got a high intensity walk-through on the menu tomorrow in an effort to have as many people participate as we can as opposed to running and practicing.

Again, that's not outside of the ordinary this time of year. You do what you need to do in an effort to get the collective ready, and also get them to the stadium in as good of physical condition as you can get them as well.

You certainly hope that there is a cumulative effect of the daily work we've had over the course of this journey that can be an asset that we can summon up when we get pressed on a short week like this week.

Now I'll give some time and attention to the Detroit Lions. Just got a lot of respect for that group and how they go about their business. They're a competitive group, physical group in all three phases. They're aggressive not only in play but schematically.

Got to tip my cap to Coach Campbell and company for that. You see their personality on tape. I'll start first on defense. They certainly absorbed a lot of attrition from recent weeks, particularly in the secondary, first at corner and then more recently at safety.

But they've also done some things in terms of acquiring talent to help fortify those depths, some NFL players, some veterans. Much like we went out and acquired Pep and Doug and others, Asante, that have helped us out, more recently they acquired Kazee, a former Steeler that I'm sure is chomping at the bit to be a contributor to them. Arthur Maulet, also a former Steeler.

So what they've put on tape and who they've played on tape in recent weeks might not be who they play in this game, and so we got a lot of respect for that. They're aggressive schematically. They play a lot of man to man. They get after you with a variety of blitz packages and so forth.

Can't say enough about their linebacker tandem; very versatile; play in all circumstances. Did a lot of research on Jack Campbell. We got a lot of Iowa guys in our program and got a lot of respect for who he is as a football man and how he plays and his relationship with the game and his natural leadership skills.

That was very evident going to Iowa and participating in their pro day efforts and getting to know those guys, taking them to dinner. He is certainly a natural leader and football player and man, and it appears from the outside that those characteristics have transferred to the professional level, and he's doing some of the things for the Lions that he did at the University of Iowa.

Got our hands full up front minimizing their rush, starting first and foremost with Aiden. He is elite. He's a game wrecker. He just is. He's a top quality rusher and very aware in terms of ball awareness, ball searching.

His availability to produce fumbles and hunt the ball as he hunts the quarterback speaks for itself. He has got very good hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills for a big man. That was on display in his interception of that 6screen last week.

But he's not a one-man game. Muhammad is having a breakout year for them as a rush man. Davenport obviously is a former first rounder and New Orleans Saint, is also a component of their collective. DJ Reader up front, veteran run stopper.

Certainly they have a bunch of capable men and I'm sure they're going to be chomping at the bit to get back on the winning track this week. We just got respect for that as competitors.

On the offensive side of the ball, man, they take very good care of the football, and it starts first with Goff. He's only thrown five interception on the season, and you couple that with his quick decision making, he has to have one of the top times to throw in football. He makes good and quick decisions. He has some capable eligibles to distribute the ball to. St. Brown and Williams, man, are a formidable tandem. They also have some other guys playing extremely well in a lesser role in terms of volume or targets, but are playmakers nonetheless.



It's not only about rushing the passer. If you're trying to minimize a guy like Goff who is functioning in the ways that he's functioning, completing 70% of his passes, not throwing the ball to the other team, we better utilize a lot of schematic strategies in terms of coverage makeups, man, zones, simulation pressures. We better work the bat passes, et cetera.

It's not only about the rush in terms of getting him and them off rhythm. We got to fight for each and every incompleteness. So that's our mindset as we lean in on the week. You couple that with the top notch running game and that formidable run tandem that they have, we got a big week for us in terms of preparing for those guys.

In terms of the run game, can't say enough about the demeanor of their collective. Certainly I know their offensive line coach and run game coordinator, Hank Fraley, and I remember him as a player. They play as a collective the way he played. He has built that unit in his image. They're a gritty group. They finish. They take pride in terms of winning the line of scrimmage and waging a war of attrition in the run game.

So we'll be challenged and challenged in a big way in that regard. But, again, it's December. The road is getting narrow. Such is life in the big show, man. We're all happy to be a component of that.

We'll narrow our focus and understand that we pay respect for this big game by living these moments day-to-day and having great days. It started for us early this morning or late last night depending on your perspective as a staff. It'll continue with the guys as they get into the building tomorrow and the effort to move forward towards Sunday.

I'll pause and open up for questions.

Q. Mike, you mentioned this time of year guys like this are (regarding Aaron.) Said much the same thing. Noticed anything palpable or detectable in the last couple games, any difference in how he prepares or plays, the look in his eye, anything like that?

MIKE TOMLIN: No, nothing relative to his process or his prep process. But it's just value, value that you can measure, value that you can't measure and having a guy that's been there and done that. It benefits him. Benefits us as a collective. I think it raises the tide for the collective.

Just certain conversations and things that you don't even worry about. We had a significant possession down late in that game and he affords us an opportunity to run a misdirection pass. You don't even have to tell him throw

an incomplete or take a sack because we want the clock running. He knows that. He lived that life.

That's just one small example. But there is countless examples of benefits of having a guy with his level of experience, the quality of that experience, particularly this time of year as the road gets narrow.

Q. After the game Aaron was talking about some of the so-called castoffs that made significant impact for you. What have you learned over the years about what it takes to position mid-season additions for success and why has this specific group been able to make an impact quickly?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, I'm never surprised by that to be honest with you. That's why we have cliches like the standard is the standard, one man's misfortune is another man's opportunity.

It's not if it's when as it pertains to injury in our business, so if you're in a position like mine, you better work your tail off to ready each and every man that's a part of the program and have that urgency daily. I certainly do, and we do as a staff.

But those are the guys that are deserving of the credit. I'll never ask guys to be patient. I'll ask them to work while they wait, and a lot of guys have done that. We get performances like many of them just displayed. It's just evidence that they have, and certainly some of them are going to get additional opportunities to do so, and maybe some new guys will get opportunities to do so as we move forward.

That's just the nature of this thing. I think your ability to adapt and adjust and pivot often defines a collective, and certainly we've had some opportunities to do so. We have had success at times and we better keep digging, because I've just been on enough of these journeys; I know it's a component of it.

Q. When you guys signed Kenny G, did you envision him being a higher volume guy than in Philly?

MIKE TOMLIN: Absolutely. You know, Saquon casts a pretty large shadow. We played that football team and Kenny made some significant plays in that game against us converting third downs early in that game that produced scoring drives. I think he converted three third downs that transferred to 17 points in the midst of that game. He also covered kicks in that game. He returns kicks.

And so what we saw was a guy that was a football player first that had a nice skillset to do a lot of things, and had



some upside because of the ridiculous cast shadow that Saquon casts. I don't know that either of us is surprised by what he's doing or what he's capable of. We saw it firsthand in-stadium as an opponent.

Q. Two areas you guys have gotten a lot better in the last two weeks, coming out of the locker room in the third quarter. You've been good in both third quarters against Buffalo -- excuse, against me Baltimore and this past game against Miami. What have you done better there do you think and what else did you do better in this game when it came to possessing the ball?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know that you can pinpoint a specific thing that you do better. I know that you better just keep working. You know, you don't always get the results that you desire immediately when you have an agenda, but if you believe in the agenda, you keep pounding away, it might just be that result that we are finally breaking through some areas that are producing the outcomes.

We might have been in the right neighborhood knocking on the right doors for an extended period of time. I just think that's the challenge of decision making and strategy in this business. Sometimes solutions come to you in an instant and you see the fruit of that instantly. Sometimes your will and commitment gets tested because you don't necessarily get what you're looking for immediately.

We haven't done anything different, significantly different in the last two weeks in that area that we hadn't been working on. Certainly I agree with you, been moving in the right direction of late.

Q. After the Bills game Aaron publically challenged the pass catchers just get on the same page, show up to things. The two weeks since, the offensive has been clicking. The pass catchers pass game has been a little bit more seamless. Is that a result of Aaron kind of challenging this group?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know the challenge that you speak of, so I wouldn't be the guy to speak to that. I'm sure you'll get an opportunity to speak to him in open locker room.

Q. You mentioned the running backs earlier. Seems like Gibbs and Montgomery complement each other really well. What makes them so dynamic and what are the keys to slow them down?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think first of all, they're talented as individuals. They are. They're talented runners, both guys. They certainly have different skillsets, Gibbs having the top end speed that he does and Montgomery having the

pick and vision and interior running talents that he does.

So they complement each other very well, but it's almost disrespectful to not acknowledge their talents as individuals. Any tandem that's really good I think has a couple individuals in it that can do it, and they certainly can and do. They need no endorsement from me. As a collective they got 21 rushing touchdowns this year, so we better come and we better come ready.

Q. You guys have used more 11 personnel the last two weeks on offense. Was that something Aaron Rodgers suggested? What did you guys see coming from that as far as success -- wise to open things up?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, sometimes it's just based on matchup, what's the best matchup for us relative to opponents. The Dolphins for example a lot of depth at corner. Minkah plays corner or nickel for them, and so it was probably more advantageous for us to have three wide receiver sets and get Minkah out of a more natural position into a less natural position. So there a lot of variables into that discussion from a strategic standpoint, and we answer those and formulate those plans week in and week out. So they're subject to change.

Q. You elevated MVS to the active roster. What have you seen or learned about him over the last month or so that he's been in the building?

MIKE TOMLIN: He certainly is a talented guy. He can run. For a taller guy he can get in and out of break points. He's got some NFL playmaking experience that's been an asset to us.

Q. Has TJ been in the facility yet? Whether he can be cleared at practice, do you expect him to be at practice this week?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know if he's been in the facility yet because I've been in a dark room in the back. He might be in the facility as we speak, so I don't have a lot of the the answers to that. I was just trying to be transparent when I said I didn't have any new information as I stood here today.

Q. ...in this setting as opposed to breathing down your neck after practice about this, but is there anything more you can tell us about what you learned about the dry needling technique or how that might continue or not continue with your team?

MIKE TOMLIN: I have no new information regarding that. None whatsoever.



Q. How has Jack Sawyer progressed, and if you need to lean on him in a tough matchup against Penei Sewell, what would that be like?

MIKE TOMLIN: Jack is doing what a lot of young quality defenders do. They make the best with what you ask them to do and work in all areas and get better. Usually those that are playmakers in special teams eventually become playmakers or defense.

He certainly has been that for us. He's made some plays on teams. Made some plays on teams last night. So I'm never surprised when they transfer that playmaking to the defensive side when they get more opportunities to do so.

He's had some opportunities this year and has made some plays. Has had a sack. Has had an interception. So I wouldn't be surprised if he displays that readiness if he gets an expanded role opportunity this week.

Q. Mike, can you tell us how you prepare defensively when you face a coach that's as aggressive on fourth down as Campbell is?

MIKE TOMLIN: No. You know, not really. We live it down in and down out. You don't get an opportunity to win fourth down until you win third down. That's the spirit in which we go about it.

Q. Mike, is the Tush Push or Steeler Shove, whatever you want to call it with Connor become more reliable for you guys and how does that impact your situational decision making?

MIKE TOMLIN: I think it's been reliable the whole time we've done it. Man, maybe we've only failed once in Chicago. It just speaks to the versatility that we have in the tight end room. We've talked a lot about that. We got a deep and diverse tight end group.

Darnell is a point of attack run blocker. Jonnu is good run after. You saw that in a lot of ways. We threw him a screen. We pitched him a toss. 'Muth is a zone killer. You saw that last night. And Connor is a jack of a trades. He's a four-phase special teamer, and does things like that for us.

I think these just more reflective of the deep and diverse group we have at that position.

Q. Mike, Patrick Queen talked about the collective, guys committing to their jobs and not jumping out and do other people's roles. How do you as a head coach try to set a stage to fix those problems?

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, I think the component of it is continuity. When you're infusing new people in you don't have a lot of continuity. Over the last several weeks certainly we've established some continuity, particularly on the back end. For example, when we moved Jalen to free safety full time and acquired Doug and some of that stuff. That began the continuity.

To have that discussion without continuity is not very realistic. We have gotten better, but you expect to as a leader and you also expect it to continue.

Q. Is that continuity a big part of the process to -- when you guys use more 11 personnel, which you don't normally, or will you switch from using a lot of single high to double high safety looks earlier in the season?

MIKE TOMLIN: You're talking sides of the ball there. One time you said 11 and then another time you said one high or two high.

Q. Right, I'm saying on either side of ball does that continuity help when it comes to trying to make those switches in-season when you guys tried to establish an identity?

MIKE TOMLIN: There is a lot of layers to that question. You're stressing me out there. I answered the 11 question. It's week to week. A lot of it is based on the matchup component of the game, and I gave you an example of last night.

What was the defensive component of that question?

Q. Earlier in the year you guys had a lot of single high safety and switched to a lot of two high safety. Just talking about continuity in helping...

MIKE TOMLIN: That's very much week to week based on who we're playing and what they specialize in and what's required for us to minimize certain components off their attack or people.

Q. Haven't had a chance to really comb through the tape, but did Dylan Cook play well enough to maybe continue playing in that role?

MIKE TOMLIN: Yeah, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. I thought he certainly did a nice job representing himself last night. As I mentioned though, we helped him schematically, but it is our job to do so.

But he was a component of a successful winning outing, and so he deserves congratulations for that and we'll see



what this week holds.

Q. ...does the matchup angle that you were discussing, very good in the middle of the field last night, DK was talking about finding the soft spots in the cover two. Can you still do that against a team like you said who plays more man and might not have as clear of an idea of what you're doing in the secondary because of their attrition?

MIKE TOMLIN: Two total separate discussions. Miami played a lot of shell and rolled up their corners and they played two high safeties a bunch. Detroit does a significant amount less than that.

So we'll do what we need to do to be successful and move the ball this week. It may dictate that we do things differently.

Q. When Pierre is cleared does he automatically become your top outside...

MIKE TOMLIN: Cross that bridge when we come to it.

Q. Herbig's hamstring an aggravation of earlier in the year?

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't know, to be quite honest with you. We just played last night and I hadn't had a chance to get a thorough update on some of the individual injuries and where they are and if they're brand new or re-aggravations of past injuries. I just know he has a hamstring.

Q. What does it say about Ben Skoronski special teams value that you played a guy listed as a wide receiver on the depth chart with a cast on his hand?

MIKE TOMLIN: He's a football player first. We talked a lot about it. Highly productive, functional tackler, big guy for the space that he plays in. It gives them a matchup advantage, particularly when he's in one-on-one circumstances. So we're thankful that he's capable and willing even in less than ideal circumstances.

See what he has for us this week.

Q. Asante played every snap; a couple weeks ago he hadn't played a game in 15 months. Were you watching that? Was that something to watch? I guess he passed the test conditioning-wise?

MIKE TOMLIN: To be honest I wasn't ant even watching it. He's the type of guy that he's in shape 12 months a year. Most corners are. He displayed that in the short period of

time he's been here in practice settings in terms of taking card defensive reps and taking defensive reps. So it was of very little concern to me or to us in terms of his participation last night.

And not only that, but he's been and every-down player when he was in LA, so it wasn't something that was the first time for him or foreign to him.

Q. What have you seen in Adam Thielen when he's not getting targeted that he has provided value to the tea?

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, he's excited to be here. He's expressed that. He's a hand-in-the-pile guy. I thought he was very active in the run game last night for example. You know, you have a lot of ways to impact the game other than touching the football, and certainly his contributions have displayed that in a short period of time.

Q. Aaron praised (indiscernible) and MVS last week for their detailed work and the timing of getting things done. What does that do for an offense to set the tone for everyone else when you see veteran guys coming in with that kind of detail?

MIKE TOMLIN: I just think that's the benefit of the veteran guys.

Q. If Seumalo can't play, does Spencer go right into guard?

MIKE TOMLIN: It's early in the process. You know, we did an in-game adjustments last night where we brought Ryan McCollum in, and he did both. With a full week to prepare we may do similar things, we may take a different approach.

But larger than that, more important than that, I'm not ready to rule out Isaac at this juncture.

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