

# Pittsburgh Steelers

## Media Conference

Tuesday, December 23, 2025

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

## Coach Mike Tomlin

### Weekday Press Conference



MIKE TOMLIN: Good afternoon. As always, I'll start with a brief synopsis, if I will, of the last performance. Certainly was a lot of significant things that transpired in this game. Just good to win games like that.

I think there is individual and collective growth when you come through the other side of tough circumstances like that, and certainly there were a lot in the game.

You know, a lot has been written and said about the spectacular play, for example, by Kenny Gainwell that allowed us to go into the halftime tied 10-10.

And certainly was a spectacular play, but when I think about that possession, I think about those converted third downs, the first one by Pat Freiermuth I think on third down and ten, and then I think there were two more by Adam Thielen that were third down and 10, third down and 11-like conversions.

To be quite honest with you, if we don't make those conversions you don't get to hear about the quality play that Kenny made. And probably equally as important, we punt the ball away and they're probably coming back at us with an attempt or opportunity to extend the lead prior to the half.

And so certainly the Kenny play was significant, but the whole sequence, those third down and 10, third down and 11 conversions that proceeded it were equally as significant for a lot of reasons.

It's just good to rise up in moments like that as a collective. I just think it's important that we recognize it. That's why we came together yesterday, man, to really analyze this tape and void the Victory Monday, if you will, because so much growth and so many things to lay to bed and gain an understanding of and appreciate because we got to do more of that as the road gets narrow certainly.

I thought situational football was big. We won a tight red zone sequence there early in the game. We certainly knew

that Detroit is an aggressive group, particularly early in the game in that area in the search for 7 points. I thought that sequence of events where we stood up and won that sequence was big.

I thought equally as important was the backed up offense that followed. We didn't produce a scoring drive, but we had an earned first down. It's so significant to get earned first downs when you're backed up. It gives you room to operate. It minimizes the potential of a subsequent score if you punt the ball away.

I think on that third down we hit Calvin Austin on our sideline and that was big. By the same token, I thought we did a really good job in backed up defense. When we did turn the ball over with Darnell going in, our defense took the field and stymied their running game, and then on third down we got a sack by Kyle Dugger that was significant.

And so we played really good backed up offense. We played really good backed up defense in those examples. Certainly just a no-blink component in our collective at the end of the game on the short field, and fighting down in and down out was significant.

Certainly wasn't easy. We absorbed some penalties, but that's just a component of play. I think largely our guys cut their eyelids off, man, and didn't blink and stayed in the fight. Sometimes staying in the fight is probably the biggest asset in your hip pocket, and so that's what I mean when say there is growth there.

From an injury standpoint, we got a laundry list of things going on here.

James Pierre worked out this morning. We'll see where that leads us. I'm sure he'll be limited and we'll follow his progress throughout the week.

No new update on TJ. I'm sure he's been in the building, but I'll gain further information about his potential participation at the early portions of the week and where that might lead.

Seumalo, same thing, no update there.



Nick Herbig is looking optimistic in terms of game availability. He will be limited in the early portions of the week.

Some in-game things that happened. Brandin Echols with his groin. I don't know where that is. Certainly hopeful. We are certainly thin in the secondary, but that's life this time of year. We'll see where his participation might pick up as we push through the week and thus his availability.

Jaylen Warren should be limited at the early portions of the week.

Spencer Anderson, likewise, but we're optimistic that both guys will be available to us.

As always, we'll do what's appropriate in terms of working hard and smart in an effort to get those guys and others to the stadium ready mentally and certainly in the best physical shape we can get them in in an effort to do so.

Now, on to Cleveland. Been looking at these guys quite a bit, certainly working with an edge. As I sit here today at the doorstep of winning the division, man, I just don't take this opportunity lightly. Divisions are won on the road in those hostile environments in those opposing cities. Certainly we've had our issues in recent years in Cleveland.

So with that understanding, we're preparing and preparing with an edge. We were in a similar circumstance a year ago at the doorstep in Baltimore and wasn't able to get it done, so excited to be here, but also urgent about where we are.

Got a lot of respect for this group, and I'll start first with their defense. You know, they're the No. 1 unit in the AFC North quite frankly. They are. Statistically they're better than any other unit in the north offensively or defensively.

They got what appears to be slam dump defensive player of the year. Got what appears to be slam dunk defensive rookie of the year in their front seven.

Myles Garrett has been an issue for us in that venue. I think he's had five sacks against us in our last two trips, neither of which we won.

And so we understand the gravity of what we're going into and how they engineer a victory and who is significant in doing so. He's at the doorstep of history, and so we certainly have respect for that.

They got a quality, experienced coordinator in Jim Schwartz who does a nice job dividing the labor up and

really getting after people schematically.

The environment component I'm sure will be something to combat. It always is going to Cleveland. So we got to put together a thoughtful plan. Certainly we could potentially lack some significant people and so forth, but, again, that's life. We better put together a thoughtful plan in terms of how we divide the labor up and put ourselves in position to engineer victory.

Looking at their offense, they've changed a lot since the last time we played them. The last time we played them Kevin Stefanski was the playcaller; now Tommy Rees is. Certainly the quarterback has changed. Shadeur is doing a really good job. He's growing and growing with each week from an outsider's perspective.

I think it's always cool when you're growing with company. Certainly see him gravitating towards some young players whose roles are expanding since the last time we played them. Can't say enough about Fanning and what he's doing. I think he's got 70 catches and over 700 yards as a rookie tight end. It's pretty special.

Isaiah Bonds's role has grown in recent weeks, and you see Shedeur really looking for him down the field. He's provided some splash for them.

Acquisition they got from the Jets in Malachi Corely wasn't heavily involved the last time we played them. He appears to be increasingly so now. Reverses and so fourth, man really utilizing his skillset and providing some splash for them.

Man, it's really unfortunate that their top young runner got hurt. I just got a lot of respect for that young man and how he plays. Certainly I never want to see anybody get hurt significantly that way, and so just sending well wishes to him, but also understanding that one man's misfortune is another person's opportunity. I'm sure they have some capable guys that have been working behind the scenes and readying themselves for their opportunity.

I certainly have respect for that and the potential of that and the unknown component of that. We're no different. Dylan Cook is getting a lot of attention for what he's providing us. He's been working in the ranks for a long period of time. I was never asking him to be patient but simply to work while he waited, and it's paid off for him and us through his participation.

So that's through the lens that we see that running back position. We certainly better be ready to minimize the run. It's been a catalyst for us in recent weeks, our ability to improve our run game on offense and minimize opposing



units's run game, and so I imagine this week will be no different.

But there is a lot of the things to discuss. Man, these waters run deep in divisional play. I'm excited about it. I'm sure our team will be. We better put together a good plan. We better have a no-blink mentality. It's December, it's that time of year.

We anticipate being challenged and challenged in a big way. That's life in this league, but that's what we love. The competitors that we are, we love that.

And so with that, I'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Mike, I imagine you talked to DK Metcalf. Did he explain in your conversations what caused him to go over and accost a fan and why did he go?**

MIKE TOMLIN: He did explain to me why he did what he did. I certainly don't condone the behavior, but I support DK. I really don't have a lot to add other than what I just told you.

I think he has a hearing this afternoon, an appeals hearing, and I certainly don't want to weigh in prior to that. I've heard more recently there might be legal ramifications, so I better be careful about what I say and how I say it.

I'm sure you guys got a lot of questions. I understand that. But that's just the posture I'm in as I sit here today with so many components of this thing yet to be resolved.

**Q. Does the team have any protocols to sort of prevent or monitor, make sure players don't go over there and have that sort of interaction? I know there is a lot going on on the sideline during a game.**

MIKE TOMLIN: Exactly.

**Q. Mike, is that a yes or no? Do you have protocols or not?**

MIKE TOMLIN: We certainly may, but I might not be privy to it because my eyes and attention is what's going on on the field. But we have a top-notch security group. Everybody in the National Football League does.

It's not only from an organization's perspective, but it's a global component as well.

**Q. From a football perspective, what do you lose is DK is not available specifically this week?**

MIKE TOMLIN: One man's misfortune is another man's

opportunity. A guy like Roman Wilson, for example, who has been working extremely hard and growing throughout the course of this thing but had his role reduced in recent weeks.

I'm excited what that opportunity might mean for him to display growth in the midst of the time where he hadn't been participating to show his professionalism and readiness and how he's been sharpening his sword for battle in the ranks while he hadn't been playing, for example.

I just think that's always the lens in which I see it. Whether it's discipline in nature or injury related, you can waste a lot of time pining for those that you don't have. As a leader I think it's my job to work and prepare those that I do have and position them to live out their dreams and be positive contributors to a winning effort.

**Q. When you say you support DK, what, if anything, does the organization do to aid him in his appeals process?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Again, I'm behind the scenes in that. I'm sure he's gained some assistance from us from a front office perspective. I just been putting together a plan to play in Cleveland this week.

**Q. Mike, two questions: What was your reaction when you saw that video?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I'll keep that to myself.

**Q. Does the organization or you prepare players for volatile rhetoric thrown their way and have you heard that in the past? How have you reacted to it?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I just think volatile rhetoric is a component of our business today unfortunately. It just is. But not only our business, college, you know, youth sport parents. It's just -- you know, I think it's just a component of sport that's developed and developed in a big way in recent years.

It's unfortunate.

But really I have nothing to say about the matter other than that.

**Q. Mike, when you say legal ramifications, do you mean from DK's side or the fan's side? Can you expand on that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: No, I can't.

**Q. DK has a history with this fan. He's reported this**

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**fan to security before. ...the NFL should or could do to protect players in this situation?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Again, I respect your questions and the fact that you guys have questions, but it's just so many components of this situation that are yet to be resolved. Me speaking on it and speaking on it in detail, and particularly expressed my opinion regarding things, doesn't help the circumstance in any way.

**Q. DK obviously had number of sort of flash points over the course of his career. What's he been like in day in and day out basis with you? Is that a part of you saying I support him?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, he's been great. He cares. He works hard. He's a heck of a guy. He's a good teammate. That's why he's easy to support.

**Q. Mike, no TJ or Nick Herbig last week. How do you see that group step up, specifically Jack Sawyer?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, love the work that Jack gave us. Certainly love the work that Alex Highsmith gave us, although we anticipated it from him. But Jay Moon as well. But schematically and strategically you don't replace TJ and Herbig; we understood that.

That's why we talked a lot about destroying the pocket from the interior. We did have full strength on our interior pass rush. They had an elevated center I think on their side, and so we approached the game that we had to win on the interior because we could get them off the spot and destroy the rhythm of their operations in doing so.

And so schematically we put together a plan with that in mind, and it didn't take long for that to show itself. I think the second play of the game Benton had a sack. So I just think that you adapt, do what you need to do in an effort to engineer victory.

We were strong inside. We lacked depth on the perimeter. We put the challenge to our interior people to impact the game in that way, we you put some schematics behind it, and we went about playing.

**Q. Is TJ at the stage where he's recovered from his procedure and is this just about getting back into football shape for him?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think that's a fair estimation. Again, I'll let him speak in terms of his medical. I think for me, to talk about injury is one thing; to talk about medical is something else.

So that's one of the reasons why I've been a little bit hesitant besides my lack of expertise on the subject matter.

**Q. So you anticipate TJ is ready to talk in the near future, maybe this week about everything going on?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I do.

**Q. Do you anticipate him returning to practice this week?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Again, I don't have that information as I sit here today. I'm hopeful.

**Q. Talked to Patrick Queen last week. He noted that something he had to grow in this year was his communication with Teryl Austin. He said he would blow up and not fully express himself. He said it was you that came in and said, we have to fix this. What led to you stepping in and how did that conversation -- how has it impacted your defense?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, Patrick is a heck of a player, but being the defensive quarterback is a new role for him. He didn't have that responsibility, although he was a significant player for the Ravens. Roquan had those responsibilities.

So it's my job as a leader, man, to help guys grow where necessary, and certainly identified that as a space of growth for him. It's really got nothing to do with playing. It's about absorbing the responsibility or the informal responsibility that comes with being defensive quarterback.

To his credit, he's not been resistant in any way and he's embraced the challenges. I'm pretty transparent in challenging him in that way. But it's been a fun process. I like being a part of someone's individual growth and development, particularly the development of a leader. There is benefit for him and benefit for the collective when you pour into that.

**Q. How have you seen that lead into the increased performance from your defense?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I think I could point to a lot of things that's a component of that. We have established some more stability within the unit over this journey. We absorbed a lot of attrition, acquired new players that weren't with us in training camp, et cetera.

So to attribute that would be a stretch. There are many variables and layers to that discussion.

**Q. Mike, if you find out Saturday night that the game**

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**gets (regarding division title) will it alter any last-minute divisions on personnel?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, it may. I hadn't thought about it at all. To be quite honest with you I just found out this game is Saturday night. I just learned to be tunnel vision or the years.

But as I sit here and make plans today for tomorrow and the effort to lay a foundation to engineer victory, that's something that's of very little relevance to me today. I have plenty of time to it ponder those things after we get a bit more solid preparing ourselves to play the Cleveland Browns.

**Q. Mike, you got some significant milestones you've approached or coming up. Any thoughts?**

MIKE TOMLIN: None. It's about this journey with this group. I'm doing a disrespect to this journey and these guys that I'm fortunate enough to lead and work with if I view it any other way. I am appreciative of some of those things. It's been a blessing.

But really have no relevance as I stand here today leaning in on this Cleveland Browns opportunity this week. It's just so many people in this collective that it doesn't apply to. Football being what it is, it's the ultimate team game. I better display that focus.

**Q. Do you expect Dylan Cook to get some help if Myles Garrett is on the other side, and how much help has he been getting in the last few games?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Everybody gets help against Myles Garrett. I just got finished watching San Francisco. Trent Williams got help. Certainly he is going to get help, but certainly everybody has gotten help and it hasn't slowed down the train. He's still got 22 sacks.

I imagine most of those are not one-on-one plays. So we're going to do our due diligence, but we're not going to act like or pretend that we're reinventing the wheel here. We better put schematics around him, better play well, better stay out of one-dimensional passing circumstances, and you still might not stop the bomb from going off. That's been how impactful this guy's play has been this year.

**Q. Evaluation of Shedeur last few weeks or how have you seen him develop?**

MIKE TOMLIN: It does not matter. He's not a Pittsburgh Steeler. He plays for the Cleveland Browns. I'll let the Cleveland Browns talk about his evaluations.

**Q. What have you seen from him in the last few weeks?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Again, I haven't looked at it through that lens. I'm looking at it through the lens of somebody that we need to compete against this week. His growth and development is not my charge. Preparing a plan to minimize and he and they do is my charge.

**Q. ...has been very good, but he's 30 years old now. He is having the best year of his career. What have you seen that's different about his play or how he's using him?**

MIKE TOMLIN: He's a freak-ish talent. He's experience. He's healthy. But he's also probably in year two with Jim Schwartz. It's reasonable to expect people to get better from year one to two, whether it's an individual or the collective. Certainly Jim has been doing it at long time and doing it at a high level.

I image I know there is an uptick in not only him, but everybody in terms of just being in year two in this system. What you're watching is probably the benefit of that.

**Q. ...point to run away from Cam Heyward a lot this season. In this game when they did it, it seemed like you guys -- your guys really stepped up. Keanu Benton, Derrick Harmon, what have you seen in their efforts to improve in the run defense and where are they at in that effort?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, I've read some of the narrative about Derrick Harmon and his run game exploits, and so I'm not going to do anything to diminish that. Maybe he's just the monster the narrative says he is. (Smiling.)

**Q. Talk about the growth and development of Kenneth Gainwell?**

MIKE TOMLIN: You know, Kenny is an awesome football player first. He's multi-talented. I've told this story several times when speaking of him. He really got on our radar when we with played him a year ago in Philadelphia. He was really significant in that game. He returned kicks, covered kicks, made a tackle on kickoff. He converted a couple significant third downs in the first half that produced I think 17 points for them.

You know, just Saquon casts a large shadow, so we thought he was capable guy and there was more there if given on an opportunity, and I think he's proven that.

**Q. You mentioned you're going to prepare with an edge and that it's been a struggle at times in**

## **Cleveland. Why has it been?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Myles Garrett. I outlined it. Five sacks the last two times we been there. He's a game wrecker. He provides the wave that others ride, and particularly in that environment when you're working on sideline counts and one-dimensional passing circumstances et cetera, it is significant.

**Q. There are four very pivotal OPI call in both directions in that game, particularly in red zone and how cluttered it can get there. Is there a functionality to how playcalling is taking place these days that are drawing those out or have you found it's been an emphasis on the league to curtail that?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Sometimes officiating crews have personalities like units and teams. We scout officiating crews in a similar way. I think going into that game that crew had called the second most penalties per game of all the crews in the NFL this year, so we went into the game understanding that we needed to play clean, that that could be the component of outcome of the game.

So that's just football in today's world. There is information at our disposal, personalities, things they call, things they don't call and prepare during the course of the week accordingly.

**Q. Mike, what is it about Ben Skowronek that made him such a good special teams player? (Regarding tackle.) Pro Bowl player.**

MIKE TOMLIN: He cares a lot. He cares hard. He's really talented. He's a football player first. What I mean by that he's a wide out that's a very good tackler, in the same ways that Kenny Gainwell is running back who is a very good tackler.

You just always love doing business with guys like that. They provide value in other ways other than getting the ball. Really enjoying or experience with Ben. It feels a lot like Darrius Heyward-Bey. We had some significant years with him as a wide receiver who was really special teams capable had passion in that space and knowledge in this space and expertise and enjoyed tackling.

**Q. When you were talking about the injuries I don't think you mentioned Calvin Austin. Is there an update on his hamstring?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I don't have one. I acknowledged it is there, but I hadn't -- I don't know if he was in the building yet or where that might be in terms of his participation or nonparticipation tomorrow and thus forward.

I'm sorry I forgot that.

**Q. How have you seen Jack Sawyer pitch in to the collective on defense, especially being his first start and he (indiscernible) put in on the run defense?**

MIKE TOMLIN: When given an opportunity, man, Jack continues to prove that he belongs. But that's what we loved about his profile, to be honest quite honest with you. He's not a guy this runs from it, he's a guy that runs to it. He's got unbelievable belief in self for a young guy. He's made some plays already. Had a sack going into the game, an interception.

He makes a lot of plays on special teams, oftentimes a young guy that's not getting a lot of defensive opportunity, that's the first space that they show their capabilities, and he's done that. So I don't think any of us are surprised by his willingness and ability to be a positive contributor to us.

Just that's what we expect from him.

**Q. How do you feel about the collective of young players that you guys have been amassing on defense, Keanu third year, Jack as a rookie, Harmon as a rookie, Black. You have a lot of young guys that are pitching in.**

MIKE TOMLIN: It's been needed, particularly up front as I mentioned. We absorbed a lot attrition during the course of that thing. Dean Lowry, Dan, Loudermilk. One man's misfortune is another guy's opportunity.

I think we did the right thing, man, fortifying depth with those bigs dating back to last spring, acquiring those two young men via the draft to go along with Jack Sawyer. It's certainly been needed.

**Q. If you clinch the division do you plan on resting guys in week 18?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I haven't contemplated the ramifications of Saturday's game so you know I hadn't pondered that.

**Q. Mike, what's the value of Spencer Anderson and all the different things he can do? How unique is a guy that can go guard, tackle, fullback?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Man, can't say enough about his versatility and his intellect. He did that at Maryland. He played every position other than left tackle at Maryland. That was a component of us really liking his profile.

You know, you got to value versatility when you're picking



later in the draft, and he certainly displayed that. But I don't want to have him in a box either. We believe he's a guy that has starter capabilities and the potential for that in his future as well.

But certainly in the short-term he's been an asset to us with all the things he's able today.

**Q. Mike, just one more on DK. To be clear because there have been some second- and thirdhand reports, did he tell that you the fan said a slur to him?**

MIKE TOMLIN: I won't discuss what he and I discussed, and I think I've been pretty clear there.

**Q. Will you speak on his behalf at the hearing he has today?**

MIKE TOMLIN: Again, I'm not discussing anything as it pertains to this because it doesn't help the unresolved component of this circumstance and situation.

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