

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Teryl Austin

Weekday Press Conference



Q. We talked after the Raiders game, and you said your guys embrace those late game moments when you've got to get a stop. Does that include them getting to the 1 yard line?

TERYL AUSTIN: It doesn't matter where you stop them, it's just that you stop them.

Again, I applaud the guys. It was a challenging situation, and they made the plays they needed to make to win. I thought the game was over a few plays ago on the fourth down, but they called a PI, so it kept it going. Then they stood up again.

So I'm proud of what they did, and I'm sure they're excited about it. They were up to it.

Q. Cam Heyward was talking about, if you want to win games this time of year, you've got to make teams one dimensional. That second half, I think it was 34 passes, one run. I know they had some success, but is that kind of how you draw it up?

TERYL AUSTIN: You'd much rather have them be one dimensional and that one dimension be pass because there's more error when they're passing the ball and the ball's in the air, a lot of things can happen. But when they're running the ball and controlling the game, that's not a good feeling.

That was it. I think we had our opportunities. I think we probably dropped three interceptions in that second half. That could have changed the game. That's really what we work on. Those opportunities are there, but we have to take advantage of them.

So the things that we want to do, which is make a team one dimensional if we do get them like we did and have them pass is take advantage when we do have an opportunity to intercept it because that changes the game.

Q. What have you guys identified as a coaching staff

and reviewed the last couple games when you guys have gotten a lead and you guys have been able to hold those leads, but the things the Dolphins were able to tap into, couldn't score on their drives, and then the Lions, what kind of went haywire that allowed their offense to spark? I know they're the No. 1 scoring offense in "3rd and" plays, but what did you guys see?

TERYL AUSTIN: I don't think anything went haywire. I think in those particular situations in the game, we were going to make them use clock. The big thing in those situations, you don't want the ball going over your head, you don't want a cheap touchdown that takes a little bit of time. We'd much rather them dink and dunk and have to move it down the field and waste time and then try to make a stop towards the end zone.

That's really when you look at the Dolphins game and this game, it was the same thing. They started the second half, and they're passing, passing, passing. We got to a certain point, and it's like let's make these guys bleed some clock and make stops when we have to.

Q. Joey had some rough patches during the middle of the year. It seems like he's gotten past that. How much does confidence play in being able to push through adversity?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think obviously that comes with age and experience. You're able to maybe get past some of the mistakes you make earlier in the year. You don't dwell on them. You work on why those mistakes were made and try to fix them. I think he's done that.

As a third year player now, he's able to really start. You can see the growth and the acceleration in it. Part of that is not dwelling on stuff that happens and not continue to let it happen. He can move past it, figure out why it happened, and work to not let it happen again.

Q. These three weeks he's been pretty solid?

TERYL AUSTIN: He's been really solid for us, yes, absolutely.

Q. The stats aren't what they were last year, but how

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would you describe the season Cam's had for you?

TERYL AUSTIN: He's outstanding. The guy is unbelievable in terms of the way he plays the run, the things he can still get pressure on a passer. I think he's got five or six sacks. And I think really amongst all of his good play, I think the big thing that he really brings is the leadership component of it and how, as a 30 -- I don't want to say how old he is. He might be 45 or something like that.

(Laughter).

But the point being he really brings a young man's mentality to the game in terms of how he works and how he operates within the room in addition to being an unbelievable leader.

I think stat-wise that's the stuff you can't measure and why he's really so good, and he's really the glue up front for our guys.

Q. When we talked to -- I talked to Patrick last week, and he said that he had to admit that he was not communicating with you particularly well early in the season. He said he would let things kind of boil up and didn't know how to communicate that. Then he said Mike came to him and said we have to fix this, and you guys sat down together. What was that like from your perspective? Did Mike come to you and say, hey, what's going on here? What were those talks like? How have you guys improved from those talks?

TERYL AUSTIN: It's just a normal thing in terms of growth. When you have a guy that's probably doing something that he hasn't done before. It's one thing to be a good component in terms of a defense, and it's another thing to have the voice of the defense in terms of you've got to communicate with guys all the time and with me in terms of how we do that.

It's just, again, Mike plays a facilitator in terms of some of that stuff. It was fine. I mean, we always communicated, but maybe it wasn't to the depths that Mike liked it or wanted it, and he thought that we could get better at it. So that's where it was. That's what we do.

It's always going to be a work in progress. We might be talking about it again. Hey, listen, we've got to continue to do that and communicate. I think that's important because, again, he hears my voice every play, and he's got -- he's like my eyes and ears to the defense. So we've got to have a good open communication.

Again, it's always going to be a work in progress, and we'll

continue to do that.

Q. The safety, is that something you guys -- forgive me I don't watch a lot of material -- is that something you guys called a lot this season or is that specific to that situation? As a coach, what is that like -- when you sort of realize and figure out maybe this is the time that we have this thing we haven't done and this is the time to do it.

TERYL AUSTIN: The biggest thing is it's really -- I think our offense turned it over, but we had them pinned back. So for us that's a big deal to keep them pinned back because, if we do that, when we get the safety like we did or we make them punt from the end zone, that really is -- that's an area that almost guarantees your offense points because of the starting field position that they would have.

So we talked about keeping them down, and that was the biggest thing, keeping them down. The call went to our normal battery of calls. We just thought that was a good time to use it because obviously there's a lot of things that you can do, but we thought that was a good time to use it based on what we thought we would get from them protection-wise, and where we thought we could hold up coverage-wise, and it happened to work out.

Q. Across the league, the teams are using the Heisman, the jumbo package in the last decade or so. From a defensive perspective, what's the challenge in defending when a team brings in that extra lineman as a tight end?

TERYL AUSTIN: Funny for us it doesn't matter as much because we are -- we're a 3-4 defense, so we always have an extra big out there. A lot of teams play out of a nickel front, 4-2, 4-3 structure, so you only have really -- you don't have the extra big guy out there. So for us it's not as big of an adjustment.

But I can see where it could cause some people some problems, but for us we usually kind of go business as normal and get on with our life and go that way because I don't -- we see that, and it doesn't bother us. It doesn't put us in a mismatch situation on the edge.

Q. How do you go from giving up on the run 200-plus yards per game against Buffalo and Baltimore, what are the reasons you go from that to stopping the run successfully the last two weeks, giving up 63 yards and 15 yards?

TERYL AUSTIN: We just played better. It wasn't -- it's not a change in philosophy. It's not a change in what we teach and how we teach it. We just played better. Sometimes

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that happens.

I think we try to assign things like, hey, why did that happen? Sometimes we just didn't play well. The last two weeks we played really well.

So that's our goal to continue to work on the things that we work on and play well because we do know they work. Some weeks they don't, but for the most part, we feel pretty good about how we teach our guys in terms of run fits, run stop, and all the different things that we do. So we stay in that plan and understand, hey, some weeks are going to be better than others. When we have a bad week, what happened? Is it something that we did wrong that week in terms of teaching, or sometimes we just didn't play well.

I think really a lot of times that's what it boils down to. Sometimes you just don't play well. It's a human game, and we're not machines. We're not going to play the same every week. But we think our teaching methods are good, they're solid. We think we have good players. We think our players care. We think we're tough enough.

So we just take it from there, and every week's a new week. We've just got it. Like this week we'll approach it, what happened last week has nothing to do with what's going to happen this week. We've got to approach it -- it's a new game, a new team, we go to work, and hopefully the results show on Sunday that we had a good week of practice and a good game.

Q. Jalen Ramsey is going to the pro bowl as a free safety. How cool is that for you to see, especially for a guy who's probably identified as a lockdown, No. 1 corner for his entire career?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, it was. It was really, it was neat. It was good. I was excited for him because I thought that was -- that's just to me shows a pretty unselfish guy because I'm sure, when he came here, the goal was not to play him at safety. So by necessity he ended up there, and he embraced it.

It's great to see a guy have success like that, so I'm really happy for him. As a player, it just kind of goes to show, when you're unselfish and you love the game and you'll do what you want for the team, a lot of times success will follow you. Again, just really excited for him. I think he's excited about it as well.

Q. What does he bring that's special when he's not making the big interception, he's not making the big hit, but it seems like he's part of a continuity that you guys have been able to keep that continued to put you

guys over the top and complement everyone else?

TERYL AUSTIN: When he first moved in there, I think after a couple weeks, that was the one thing I said standing up here was he brings some stability back there in terms of moving position. Sometimes he was playing it, sometimes he was out of it, but now he's back there full-time. I think he's a good communicator.

He is, he plays the game the right way. He plays with a nice attitude and demeanor, and I think that rubs off. So he brings all those positives back there. So that was really good for the group and for us.

Q. Harold Fannin had a pretty big game against you the last time. Since then he's had a lot of those against a lot of other people. What's the specific challenge with him, and how is the way they use him and Njoku together maybe unique?

TERYL AUSTIN: The challenge is he's become, he's basically become their go-to option. He can do a lot of things. He's really good after the catch. He's a strong runner. He can get into pockets in the zones. He's a hard matchup for linebackers and safeties. So he does a lot of really good things.

I think he and the quarterbacks, the young quarterbacks, Gabriel and now Shedeur, but those guys, those youngsters a lot of times, you work together a lot, so you develop a rapport, and I think you can see that. So he's going to get a lot of targets.

The challenge between he and Njoku is obviously you've got two really good pass catching tight ends and guys that can stretch the defense, so they're going to stretch it a little bit. The challenge is how do you hold up in the pass game but still be real solid versus the run? I think that's really going to be our big challenge this week.

Q. Are you anticipating Sawyer playing 90 percent of the snaps?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, once we figured out we weren't going to have Herb and T.J., it's, hey, guys, let's go. He's in great shape. I think he's up to the challenge.

The one thing I'll say about Jack, and we kind of saw this when he first got here, the first thing you go is the game is not too big for this guy, so the stage wouldn't affect him. He went out there, I thought he played his butt off, played a heck of a game.

I'm excited for him and really for his future. Hopefully he takes it from here and grows from here and continues to



get to be a better player.

Q. This summer Gerald said that he thought Joey was an elite player at the line of scrimmage, but it was after five or ten yards where he would maybe lack trust in himself or lack trust in his technique that he needed to fix to clean up those penalties. We've seen that happen over the past six to eight weeks. What have you seen in Joey that's allowed him to trust his technique through the whole play, get his head back to the football to make more PDUs rather than maybe grabbing and stuff he did in the past that was maybe not part of his game?

TERYL AUSTIN: I just think it's a maturation process. You get in your third year, and this is where you start to figure out the game, figure out the league, figure out what you're good at and what you need to work at. He figured out, hey, down the field is where I'm getting in trouble.

You're listening to your coaches, and coaches are hanging on him -- they're hanging with him, but they're pushing him and helping him realize, if you do it this way, man, you're going to be a lot better player. It's like a lot of things, once you do it and you see you have some success at it, you'll continue to do it. So he's continued to work at it, and that's probably why -- again, he's cut back on the penalties. He's been really good down the field. He's getting around the ball. He's finding the ball.

He's developed. I think overall he's tackling well. He's doing a lot of things a lot better than what he did in last year's campaign, and I think that's important because every year you're looking for some growth from your young guys, and I think we're seeing it with him.

Q. How has it helped you with Jalen for you plan around your secondary to know Jalen in his new role, we heard Jalen talk early in the preseason in training camp, he said, I'm going to do that, take down the No. 1 receiver. Now it's Joey while Jalen is conducting things on the back end. How as a planner, how does that help you coordinate what you've been able to do this year in the secondary with these roles?

TERYL AUSTIN: Again, once we were able to stabilize what we could do back there and who was doing it, it obviously makes it easy for me to plan because I know the strengths of the guys that I'm dealing with and the strengths that we're going against. That's really the biggest thing, just the stability in the back helped us plan, and it helps me because I know, we know where Joey's going to be, who he's going to be on, and now we know who's running things in the back end in terms of making the calls and getting on slot receivers and doing stuff like that.

It just makes the whole thing a little bit -- I'm not going to say easier, but it makes it a little bit more clear for me.

Q. How did having Derrick Harmon back help the run defense? Did you get a sense of the emotion for him returning?

TERYL AUSTIN: Shoot, when Derrick Harmon plays, we're good (laughter).

It was great to have him back. He's such a good young man. I mean, you can feel it because he's a big, talented guy. He did some really good things in there against what many would consider maybe the top tackle in the game. It didn't look like a mismatch, I can tell you that. So that was great to see.

I'm sure that game was -- it was. It was emotional for him getting to go back home and seeing his family and with all the things that have happened in the last year. It was tough, but our guys rallied around him, really rallied -- you know, they rallied around him in terms of support and knowing that this would be a big game going back to his hometown, and he responded, they responded, and it was really good. It was really what good teammates do.

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