

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Weekday Press Conference



Q. This rushing attack, you guys were able to contain Derrick Henry. Since then you guys have allowed the fewest rushing yards in the last few weeks. There was a big charge this offseason to fix the run defense. Is there a sense that this is -- this specific test is a culmination of all the work that you guys have put in personnel-wise and schematic-wise?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think those tests, they come every week, you know. The last through weeks we've lived up to the test and tomorrow or excuse me Sunday will be another test and we'll see if we live up to it.

That's really the goal. So to say we've arrived at anything in this league, I will never say that. You always got to fight your tail off to be on top and to try to win the circumstance, win the situation, win the game.

So we just have another -- we look at it like, hey, we got another chance to try to be better than we were last week this week, and that's our goal.

Q. TA, when you guys were looking at things with the run defense this offseason, Derrick Harmon was probably the biggest move you made. Obviously Mike's had some fun with the numbers of when he's in versus when he's out. Did you see when you were looking at him the ability to have this kind of impact as a rookie and how rare is that to have a big guy like that be able to come in and play...

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, we thought he would have an impact. That's why we drafted him. We knew he was very talented. We knew he would be able to do -- from a skillset-wise we knew he would be able to do all the things we would ask him to do. How fast that happens, that's usually up to the player.

So it's not unexpected. We're glad he's doing it. We're pleased he's doing it. You know, so in that perspective, we didn't miss out. It's good to see a young guy. Sometimes it's hard for young guys. I think part of it he has a pretty

good room. We got a nice mix of vets and younger guys and the vets have done a good job I think of helping our young guys simulate to the NFL game.

I think that always helps. It's not a bunch of young guys learning from young guys. Sometimes that's when you take some lumps. But if he's learning from old guys and he's getting the lay of the land and how to do it and he has the ability to do it, I think that's why you see a lot of improvement and a lot of, you know, good football play from them.

Q. Along those lines, get the sense that you and Coach Tomlin feel like it's not just Derrick Harmon that makes a difference against the run. What else is going right for you guys when you've been more solid against the run other than just the...

TERYL AUSTIN: I think when you -- when you're playing well against the run, I think when you look at your bigs up front, they're able to -- they're playing with their hands, not running sideways, knocking people back. We try to make a point when we watch the tape of when we see good run defense and us playing good run defense, as we're watching the tape I can see everybody's number. I can see the back of their number. I don't see it sideways. I don't see sides.

I see him square knocking people back. I think that's really the big thing. That's really what helped us, is when we're playing good defense you can see it. You can see all of our guys, they're playing square. We're not running sideways creating creases and holes, so that's really the big thing that helps us play well.

When our bigs are playing like that, linebackers are able to play downhill and it's trickle effect. Our perimeter guys have to play well, too. We don't have good run defense if our perimeter guys are not involved, and so I think in the last three weeks our perimeter guys have done a good job in terms of being on the edge and tackling and not letting things get outside of the defense.

Q. Might be self-explanatory, but what does it mean if you get TJ Watt back this week, especially knowing how well these perimeter guys have been playing

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without him on the field?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, you know, you always want a guy that has TJ's ability and the ability to impact the game the way he does.

So it'll be great to have him back. You know, in what capacity we'll find out really not until Sunday. But it'll be great to have him back.

I would think he'll only strengthen or group in how we play and all those things.

Q. TA, how do you prepare for Lamar versus Huntley, not knowing who might start? Do you look at Huntley as a guy who can pretty much run their offense regardless, just because he has a similar skillset to Lamar?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I think when you -- we've been in the stadium with Huntley before. He's done a good job. He's a good football player. I think they do run the same offense. I just think obviously when you're talking about Lamar he's kind of one of one and so some of the things that he does there is not anybody else that does it.

But he does I think Huntley can run the offense and be very efficient at it and do a lot of the same things. Maybe some things aren't just as spectacular as the way Lamar does it.

Q. Coach, what is the key to being disciplined on defense? And what I mean by that, everyone (indiscernible) this game coming up, Derrick Henry will run the ball. So from a discipline standpoint, the defensive players being more concerned with stopping Derrick Henry and having receivers leak into the open -- you know, catch the ball down the field?

TERYL AUSTIN: You know, it's always -- I think that's every week. The biggest thing here is not so much the receivers when we're trying to stop Derrick Henry, but it's more of the quarterback runs, the different things that come off that.

Because when you're trying to stop Derrick you have to commit bodies to the run game. He's not a small man. I don't think I'm stating anything not in the obvious there.

But you got to commit to that run game. Sometimes if you over commit and you bring an extra guy or just get out of your gap or you're trying to do too much, and that leaves the quarterback run game open.

So I think more so than the receivers, our biggest concern

is the ability that both of the quarterbacks bring in terms of the run game and the run threat because they make it 11 on 11 game.

And that is really the big thing there. That's not the wide receivers leaking, it's the quarterback run game.

Q. Malik knows this rivalry well. What kind of impact has he had as a run stopper for you guys?

TERYL AUSTIN: He's been outstanding. I know he got banged up in the first game the year and missed some time, but then since he's been back he's been really good. We try to use him in the run situations and he's a stout run defender. He's a big human. Good guy.

And so he's been really impactful. I know in the first game he got injured, but he was playing well and playing physical and doing the things that we needed him to do, so we'll expect that again this week. But he has been giving that to us and it's been really beneficial.

In a way -- and it's all freed Payton up to do the things he does best, which is covering and blitzing and all that stuff. So it's kind of worked out for us. We're letting guys play to their skillset and that's really I think why we're able to play a little bit better.

Q. TA, are there any secrets this time of year? Is it just like, hey, especially it's a division rival or is it more we know what you're going to try to do, you know what we're going to try to do, and it's whoever executes or plays best?

TERYL AUSTIN: That's usually what it is. There is so much tape out there right now. You know, nobody is going to reinvent the wheel in this week 17, week 18. Nobody is going to do that. So really does become a matter of how well you execute, how well you take care of your business, how well you know your opponent.

That's really what the game is going to come down to. You know, we know each other. We're going to have to play better than they play. That's really all it comes down to. There is not going to be any secrets out there. There is not going to be some surprise, oh, they're doing something crazy or something different. That is not going to happen.

Q. TA, Alex has seven sacks this week. He's been on a real tear since he came back from his pec injury. Even without TJ and Herb, as the main rusher, what allows him to be such an effective player?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think when you watch him, obviously he's -- he has been really, really good, playing really good

football for us.

But he is really a strong explosive individual, and you watch him on the edge when he sets the edge in the run game. Then he does a good job in it terms of rushing the passer and then being able to play him and rush in different ways in terms of he'll hit him with speed, with power, with spin.

So I think that's why he's really been able to play at a good level, because he plays with such a great tempo and he has a lot of different things in his bag, and there is some finesse but also a lot of good power behind it.

I think that's why he's played really well and we'll need it this week.

Q. TA, can you give a pitch for Joey Porter, Jr. to either be another Pro Bowl selection or even be All Pro this year? He has the longest streak of corners not allowing a touchdown.

TERYL AUSTIN: New stats, I like it. (Laughter.) I tell you, I did. I said it to one of our guys. You know, I think he's starting to play really well. It's good to see as his third we're goes on. As he starts to get better you see the maturity process. It starts in the classroom and in all that stuff and then bringing it to the practice field.

I think we've seen growth in that area and it's spilled over into his play in terms of it's more consistent, it's better, it's competitive. I think he's tackling well on the outside. He's solid there. He's doing some good stuff. He's in the right spots. So I do. I'm not going to lobby for anybody to be anything other than the best football player they can be for us. The guys out there make the judgment on what he should get.

Q. Why does he seem to hate the Ravens so much?

TERYL AUSTIN: Who, him? I think that might be his dad. He might have got that a long time ago. I'm not sure. You would have to ask him. I haven't sensed that. I just know he loves rivalry games. He loves -- I think he really likes when the stakes are higher as a competitor. May be that's why are. There is nothing more high than in this week for us because it's a win-or-go-home game for everybody.

Q. How do you protect against the option run this game? They only used it minimally the first time you played this year. It was something they used a lot last year.

TERYL AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

Q. How do you get your guys ready for that when Derrick Henry has been such a threat?

TERYL AUSTIN: That's, again, the challenge. It really becomes assignment football and trying not to do too much. The bottom line is guys got to win their assignment and that gives us an opportunity to be able to take care of all facets of the run game.

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