

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Weekday Press Conference



Q. As you look back at that 2023 matchup against Houston Texans, Nico Collins had a big game against you guys. As you lean on this one, what can you learn from that? And then with Joey Porter, Jr., I imagine he could be going up against him a fair amount. What are some of the coaching points when he's going up against another bigger-bodied, physical receiver?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think first thing is what happened in '23 will have no bearing on what happens this weekend or Monday. You know, guys grow, they change. So the way we'll approach it is we know he's a big-bodied receiver. He gets a lot of one-on-one things back side, and those are kind of how we'll approach it.

We know he's a big, physical receiver. CJ's got a lot of trust in him. Could be matched up with Joey, but like all things, we're not going to leave him out there and say, hey, have fun. We got to do some things coverage-wise to help him out, you know, at times, and do different things if they're matched up together.

So we'll go about our game plan to try to do what's best to try to make sure that he doesn't have explosive plays and change the game that way. Then we'll -- our goal is to win the game no matter what it looks like.

Q. To your point about how people grow and change, how have you seen Stroud develop in the two years since you saw him in that first game?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I mean, I think when you watch him, what I've seen this year is he looks like he has really good control over the offense, doing a great job in terms of finding the right guy. You know, they move the pocket. He does a good job when he's out of the pocket finding it, throwing with accuracy. He gets rid of the ball. He's not a guy that holds the ball and makes a lot of turnovers.

So to me that, shows a guy who has really good control of the offense and gives them an opportunity to win. So he's going to make it hard for us. We're going to have to earn it

and figure out a way to try to -- because we like to create some turnovers, give our offense short fields because we think that helps us get to the point of being able to win a game.

And so they are the best in the league at protecting it, so we're going to have a big challenge this week.

Q. Last week I asked you about discipline and wide receivers possibly leaking into the secondary, being open.

TERYL AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

Q. That's what happened last week. So as a result of that, from a communication standpoint do you feel as though you all identified what the breakdown was and are on the path to correcting it?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, we're always going to do that. I think the biggest thing was that we had to -- at the time it was those are third and short, fourth and short, and we were going to try to make sure that we didn't let Lamar and Derrick control the game, and we didn't execute it the way we wanted to. Didn't work out; they won those particular downs.

So we'll get back to the drawing board and see what we can do better to make sure that doesn't happen again. Again, we take risks like that to try to make sure that their best guys don't beat you, and we lost in those particular instances.

Q. Mike talked on Tuesday about the development of Keanu Benton. How have you seen him grow over the course of this season?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think what you see is you see a little more consistency. We used to see flash. He would flash and make some really good plays and then you wouldn't feel him for a while. I think the thing that's more consistent with him now is he's flashing more plays and making more plays.

That's really the thing. That's a good thing to see in a young guy in his third year, growing and starting to make

plays consistently, because that means usually you've run yourself into a pretty good player, a guy who has grown up, a guy who is able to be a guy that you can count on as part of your defense to be really consistent and give you what you want week in and week out.

Q. We talked to Arthur. He kind of laughs at you start fast, and you think offensively you usually think start fast or get a lead or something. Defensively how can you set a tone or get momentum or seize momentum early in a game as a defense?

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, I mean, we have to. Shoot, the last two games I think we've give up a touchdown early, maybe the first drive. That's obviously not how we want to start, but we don't -- the one thing we don't do is we would like to start fast, but if it doesn't happen we won't panic. We know it's a 60-minute game.

So we just kind of figure out, listen, how do we work on these things in practice? What do we do to try to give ourselves the opportunity to get off to a really good start and get some momentum, give our offense a short field?

That's really what we're looking for. So we'll get back at it. We'll try to do that this week, because it is, it's important. You want to get off, have good momentum, have good vibes to start the game. You don't ever want to fight an uphill battle so to speak.

But if we have to do, we will.

Q. TA, Mike the other day called Hunter and Anderson the two most dynamic edge rushers in the league and went into their sack totals. You got some pretty prideful guys in your room there. Is that a little gamesmanship from him?

TERYL AUSTIN: You would have to ask Mike. I'm not in Mike's head, so, you know, I just know they are, those guys are really good. We think our guys are really good, so, you know, we are just hoping our guys show up and give us their best effort and best selves this weekend and it helps us win.

That's really all I care about.

Q. Do you consider it a legitimate edge playing at home for the edge rushers?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, it usually is.

Q. If so, how much?

TERYL AUSTIN: Well, a lot of times it is a little bit of an

edge at home because of the crowd noise. Most times the visiting offense has to go on a silent count, and so that usually works well when you're at home.

When you're on the road as a rusher usually it's quiet, and so you don't get as good a get-off as you do at home.

But, you know, good rushers find a way to get home no matter what, so it doesn't matter. And that's really the biggest thing, I think.

Q. How much more do you have available when you have all three pass rushers out there with Herbig and TJ and Alex? How much more is on the menu for what you guys can do?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think Jack Sawyer is going to be mad you didn't mention his name. I think there is lots of things we can do. I think that like last week, we got Herb was out there with those guys. We'll do the best we can to try to create some matchups and try to get some one-on-one situations.

We do feel like we have some good rushers, some guys that can really put some pressure on the quarterback. There is always things you can do, and so we'll look into those and see the best matchups we feel to try to make sure we get pressure on the quarterback and get him down. You know, make second and longs third and longs and make third and longs an opportunity to get our fist in the air and get off the field.

Q. Did TJ play at the level you expected him to coming off the long...

TERYL AUSTIN: TJ was fine. It's just you got a guy that's missed three or four weeks coming back. You know how it is, everybody thinks oh, I'll just come back in and be the same guy I was. It's going to take you a minute to get your legs under you and get used to the timing of everything.

And, you know, people don't realize how much pass rush is a lot about timing and hand usage. There is a whole bunch that goes into. As you get back and get back into the game, you know, you have to get those things working again.

I think -- I assume he'll be better this week than he was last week, and we'll take it from there.

Q. Did you have your fingers crossed with him or were you surprised you got 42 snaps out of him?

TERYL AUSTIN: I'm not surprised at anything I get from TJ just because I know the way the guy is always in shape.



So he had a setback, but it wasn't one of those things where he's going to be -- you worry about him getting so far out of shape or so weak that he wouldn't be able to work.

So it was good to get 42 snaps out of him. I really wasn't counting. It was up to him about how do you feel. Few times during the game I just walked guy and said, hey, how you feeling? You good? He was like, yep, I'm good to go.

So I'll trust him. If he tells me it's good to go it's good to do.

Q. The Texans offense, not only limits splash plays from a protection standpoint, but also a turnover standpoint. What do they do so well to limit other defenses from having those explosive plays that can flip a game?

TERYL AUSTIN: You talking about Texans offense?

Q. Yeah.

TERYL AUSTIN: They do a good job taking care of the ball. Bottom line is they protect. They get it out quick. He doesn't take unnecessary risk. He's not -- you're not going to see him throwing into -- when you watch it, you watch the tape, you very rarely see him throwing in a triple coverage and double coverage. He's fine in the open man and he's getting it to the right guys.

To me that's a testament to what I said earlier in terms of him having a really good grasp of the system, knowing where to go with the ball, and getting the ball to the right guy.

Q. I know you're probably more worried about winning than anything else, but TJ has never won a playoff game, Cam, one. Nearing the end of his career, can you use that as a rallying point?

TERYL AUSTIN: No. I think we just want to win this game. I mean, it's like any game. We just want to win this game. You know, you put too much historical context on it -- I mean, shoot, half the guys that haven't been here, they haven't -- we got a whole bunch of guys just joined us after August.

So the bottom line is we just want to win this game. I don't think we have to put anything extra on it. I think having an opportunity to be in the playoffs, having an opportunity to -- if you win you get to move ahead and have an opportunity to try to win the Super Bowl, I think that's the most important thing.

So the only way you can move ahead is to win the game

you have in front of you. Forget what's behind you and what's ahead. Just win this game, and then we'll take it from there.

Q. TA, with that being said, when you see the way that -- Cam getting dinged up by Pierre because he's chasing a guy 30 yards down the field on the first snap, when you see TJ playing three weeks after having surgery, you see Alex, like the motion after that Lamar play, after the hit after he missed the sack, when your new see that from your best players, what kind of affect does that have on you?

TERYL AUSTIN: I think we talked about that before in terms of our best players are -- right now for us they've been, they're our best leaders and our best examples for our guys. So they've always been that way.

And so I mean, I seen that. Shoot, I watch Cam chase guys all the time. It still -- to me it amazes me. I watch him and you just watch how he runs and how he plays, and there is young guys that don't do what he does.

So he's a unicorn in a lot of ways, but he's also a unicorn in terms of his demeanor and leadership and all that other stuff.

I think that's -- we talked about it. We've got good leadership. We've got good things. I think that brings the rest of your guys along all the way because they know how much they care. They don't ever -- your best players don't push stuff aside. It means a lot to them. So I think that has a really good trickle-down effect on everyone.

Q. Speaking of Cam, when Darnell went down they could have grabbed someone else from offense, could've grabbed a D-linemen with less on his plate. Whose idea was it to come take your big horse and put him behind his brother?

TERYL AUSTIN: I don't know who it was, but Connor hated it. (Laughing.)

But point being, I don't know. I don't know. I just know I'm assuming they said, hey, Cam, this helps the team. He said, all right, I'm in. That's all I can assume.

Q. Cam get to a different level Sunday?

TERYL AUSTIN: He was. But he's been that way. I mean, he is. He's played well all year. He's always been, as we all know, really good against the run. But you watch in terms of his effort and his leadership and all that stuff, it's -- you know, it's just top notch.

When you get into thick moments like that, get into games where every snap is counting, it's a win-or-go-home moment, you like those guys to be out in front. He was right out front.

Q. Every week seems as though there is a challenge going up against the tight ends. This week is Dalton Schultz. What kind of challenge does he present?

TERYL AUSTIN: A bunch because he's a guy that -- he's not your typical tight end. He can split out and run routes and do a bunch of different things.

So he's going to require some attention. Again, that's every week. That's the NFL. So we'll try to hopefully have a plan in place that, you know, we keep him where he's not getting explosive plays. You know, guys are going to make catches, guys are going to do some things. You just don't want them to wreck the game that way.

I think we'll have something in place that way.

Q. Obviously Baltimore runs a different scheme, but what does to tell about where you are at defensively when you get your top two tacklers are defensive lineman?

TERYL AUSTIN: That's good. (Laughing.) And not your secondary guys? That's good. That means that they are controlling the front. You know, we sat in here last week and I talked about how like when we watch tape and you can see the back, the numbers and names of our guys, that were playing pretty good defense up front, and I think we have been.

It's a testament to those guys up front. I think they been playing hard, they been playing sharp, really good technique, really physical, and we're going to need that. I mean, that's basically what this game is.

And so if we don't get that effort and that thing up front, then it makes it harder to get a victory.

Q. Teams are very different than they were then. They have different coordinators. How much of this game do you feel like is sort of on you as a coaching staff to figure out how the game is going to play out and how the two teams will fit together, and the coaching staff that does a better job of that is...

TERYL AUSTIN: I think all games are like that. It's our job to kind of set the table for our players.

Q. In comparison to Baltimore where there is familiarity for your guys.

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, but you still have to set the table for your guys. I think you still have to let them know whether we're playing Baltimore who we know really well or playing this group who we don't know very well, you know, what we think their strengths, weaknesses are, where they may try to attack us, the people that are important for them in what they do.

It's up to us to play that out and make sure we get that across to our players so when we go in the game they don't feel -- you don't feel lost, you don't feel like, hey, I didn't know this was going to happen.

If you can get that across to your guys, then I think you have the ability or the chance that they're going to play really fast and really well.

Q. Coach, you've talked about guys since August, guys throughout the season defensively that have come join the team. In terms of your ability to coach these guys and have comfortability with them moving forward, kind of talk about how good that is or how well you feel with it.

TERYL AUSTIN: Yeah, you know, when you get guys, and as Mike likes to say, get on a moving train around here, sometimes it takes a little bit. You may know them from where they came from and you have seen them on cross film. Until you've been in battle with them, in meeting rooms with them, been at practice, you really don't know.

And I think as we've gone through the season we are starting to -- you know, for me, I get to know a little bit more about the new guys, quote-unquote, new guys each week so I have a little bit better feel for, you know, what they like, what they're good at, what they're maybe not so good at, you know, ways we can use them to help us.

So it's good thing. I think all the guys we've gotten have been really good in terms of trying to assimilate in how we play and what we do. So I think that's been good. I think that's why as the season has gone on I think we've played better. Earlier in the year there was a little bit, we were kind of scattershot a little bit everywhere, but I think we've settled down.

We still have our warts like anybody does, but I think I like the product we're putting out there a little bit better right now than I did earlier in the year.

Q. Your schedule, inordinate amount of, lack of a word, big teams, run teams that play a lot more maybe (indiscernible), that type of thing. Payton Wilson hasn't played that much the past month. He's one of

your more prominent players. Is that -- you build a roster to have matchup specifics against teams? Is that fair to say when you out together a defense?

TERYL AUSTIN: That's fair to say. We will do and try to get the best matchups that we can in terms of who is on the field. And so, again, you're right, run heavy teams we're going to have Malik out there; pass heavy teams probably see bit more Payton.

Again, my job is to make sure we put the best thing out there to give us an opportunity to win and be successful that day, and so that's where we are.

But I think that's how we're built, and I do like that we do have that flexibility. You know, it's not a situation where we have to put Malik out there and he's doing some things he can't do, or putting Payton out there and he's doing some things he can't do. Just using those two guys as an example.

But we're able to mix and match and move around and not really put guys in position to do things they can't do.

Q. Three of the top four receivers are like 6'3", 6'4". What problems do tall receivers like that present? Does it cause you to adjust anything?

TERYL AUSTIN: Big receivers can be a problem because, again, if they're big bodies, their catch radius is usually a little bit longer. Ball doesn't have to be right on them like some smaller guys at times.

But I don't think it affects what we do. You know, as a player you have to always play to your strengths, and if I'm a smaller corner going up against a big guy, I'm probably not going to press him and get in a hand fight with him because I'm probably going to lose those games.

I may play off and use my quickness to try to work angles and different things like that. So there is a game within a game that you play. But it does. At some point it could give you some issues if you have combat catchers, guys that can really, when the ball is in the air fight for it and they're strong at the point of attack, then it could give you some problems. If they're not and you got a feisty group you can win those battles.

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