

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Art Rooney II

Weekday Press Conference



ART ROONEY II: As you know, yesterday Coach Tomlin and I met, and Mike informed him of his decision to step down as head coach of the Pittsburgh Steelers. It was an emotional day for everybody in our organization yesterday. Mike has been a great leader of our franchise now for 19 years and led us with toughness, integrity, and always reflected the values of our organization.

I think you all know his many accomplishments: Two Super Bowl appearances, one Super Bowl victory, many AFC North titles and many, many wins. Bottom line was we were always in contention with Mike, and that's what counts.

More than his accomplishments, Mike was a steady and respected leader, cared deeply about our players, our staff and the whole Steeler organization. He represented the Steelers with class and dignity every single day. On behalf of my family, everyone connected with the Steelers, I want to thank Mike and his family for being part of Steelers football for the last 19 years. We'll always be grateful.

Now, obviously, we turn to our search for our next head coach. Omar and I will lead the search, and we'll rely on others in the organization to help as we go forward.

Look forward to getting started with the search and starting with the next chapter of Steelers football.

Q. Art, did you get any sense over the past couple weeks, months that Mike was possibly leaning in this direction? And was it his decision alone?

ART ROONEY II: Well, it was his decision. I will say that I wasn't shocked. But I wasn't expecting that conversation yesterday, either.

When you get to this stage of a career, obviously he even mentioned it himself, that he was nearer to the end than to the beginning. You could see that coming.

As I said, I can't say that I was shocked.

Q. Would you have been willing to give Mike the extension on his contract until 2027, and did he ask for that?

ART ROONEY II: I'm not going to get into his contract at this point. I was certainly willing to take another run at it next year with Mike, and that's what I was expecting to talk about yesterday. But obviously it went in a different direction.

Q. For how long did that conversation last with Mike yesterday?

ART ROONEY II: Probably 15, 20 minutes, something like that.

Q. How long before the team meeting did he let you know that that was going to be his plan?

ART ROONEY II: I guess it was late morning or something like that.

Q. Every year there is scrutiny and criticism of the coaching base, but it may have reached a different level this year with the "fire Tomlin" chants. Did you get a sense in talking with him how maybe the fan reaction or negativity may have influenced his decision?

ART ROONEY II: You know, I think that I'll leave it to him to explain to you someday what all went into his decision. I think that in my mind and the discussion we had, it was probably more of a family-related decision than a football-related decision. But as I say, I don't want to speak for Mike on that.

Q. What is the timeline of getting another coach in here, perfect scenario?

ART ROONEY II: I don't want to put an exact time frame on it. We'll get started right away, and it'll take weeks at least, I would say. Nowadays there are a number of protocols we have to follow that are sort of really designed to slow the process down. As I say, it'll probably take at least a few weeks.

Q. You guys haven't done this very often over the years, but you've had a type. Does young, up-and-coming defensive coordinator still work as a blueprint, or would you expand on that?

ART ROONEY II: For now, I don't want to put any real parameters around it. We're going to be an open book in terms of who we look for and the list that we build. Can I sign up for another Chuck Noll or another Bill Cowher or another Mike Tomlin? Sure, somebody that we feel fits that mold would be great. But for now, we're not going to kind of narrow the box too much.

Q. Along those same lines, what traits or characteristics are important to this organization when you are looking for a new head coach?

ART ROONEY II: You know, I think there are a lot of things that go into being a successful head coach. One number, really, I think in my mind is leadership and really trusting that this person can stand up in front of your team day in and day out and hold their attention and have them motivated to do what they do. That's the most important.

Q. Can you explain what's left on Mike's contract and how that will affect things moving forward?

ART ROONEY II: I'm not going to get into the contract today. I don't think that's necessary at this point.

Q. A lot of coaches aren't looked at to be play callers, guys that are more heavily involved in schematics. I know having that leader in the room is important, but how much is having that intertwined into the decision making and the search to find that next CEO of your coaches?

ART ROONEY II: Like I said, there's a lot that goes into it, a lot of qualities that you look for, and obviously somebody that has the experience of doing what we need them to do is going to be key.

Q. When you do this as infrequently as you have, it's been a long time, what do you remember about the search for Mike, how involved were you in that process, and is there anything you remember from that time that is fresh in your mind as you go forward now?

ART ROONEY II: Look, I've been involved in a number of searches going back to Coach Cowher and obviously GM searches. I think when you start the search, I think if I've learned anything, it's to have an open mind. When we had Mike in for his first interview, I certainly wasn't expecting that he was going to be our next head coach.

I think you go through the process and be diligent, and hopefully you come out with the right guy.

Q. Obviously you were happy with the job that Mike was doing and didn't necessarily expect that he was going to tell you he was leaving but you also weren't surprised. With that in mind, have you had an eye or just looked around over the last couple years of guys that could possibly be in line, that you would be interested in interviewing if there was a head coach opening here?

ART ROONEY II: Not really. I haven't spent a lot of time doing that, to be honest.

Q. I know you don't want to talk about the contract itself, but obviously he's still under contract. There could be compensation or trade; did he indicate he might want to coach again, and would you be interested in something like that?

ART ROONEY II: You know, Mike indicated that he did not anticipate coaching at least in the near future. I think he wants to spend time with his family and do some of the kinds of things he hasn't been able to do for the last many, many years. If something like that comes up, we'll deal with it when it comes up, but right now, that doesn't seem to be on his radar.

Q. Could you kind of take us on maybe a day-to-day level with Mike? What are you going to miss most about the everyday interaction with him, and just moving forward knowing that Mike is not in the facility?

ART ROONEY II: Mike was great to work with day in and day out, just an incredible presence in the building, someone that you walk into a meeting and discuss what needs to be done, and that's the plan. No backtracking on things, no sort of hidden agendas, anything like that. Great to work with.

Q. Do you anticipate anybody currently on Mike's staff being a candidate to replace him, or is the idea to start fresh with somebody outside the building?

ART ROONEY II: You know, right now I don't think that anybody on our staff is a candidate. Maybe a candidate to stay on the staff, depending on what the new head coach wants to do. But probably not as a head coach.

Q. In terms of that, with the new head coach, will you open that door for them to create a staff, or do you want a hand in that?

ART ROONEY II: No, a big part of the search for a new head coach is really understanding their ideas about the staff and who they would want to hire. So yeah, that's an important part of the discussion.

Q. Will the new coach have as much say in player personnel as Mike did, or will the dynamics and chain of command shift a little bit with how long Omar has been in his role?

ART ROONEY II: I don't think I anticipate really changing our structure or chain of command. I expect the new head coach, like Bill Cowher, like Mike Tomlin, like Chuck Noll, will be very involved in preparing for the draft and working closely with Omar and his staff and making sure we're ready.

Q. I know you said you don't have a timeline, but is there a date you need a head coach by, maybe the combine or something like that?

ART ROONEY II: I mean, if you have to put an outside date on it, certainly the combine would be -- it would be nice to have one before then, yes.

Q. Mike was close with a lot of the veteran players. Do you foresee this maybe being a roster reset where you will get younger because of what happened?

ART ROONEY II: I think it's too early to say what effect it's going to have on the roster. The new coach obviously is going to have a lot to say in that. We'll have that discussion when the time comes.

Q. Following up on that, you guys have had a type of 3-4 defense and you guys have developed players around that identity. How much is that involved in your search? Is that something that you guys are prioritizing finding a coach and then will figure out adjusting the roster after the fact?

ART ROONEY II: Well, I think part of the discussion with candidates will be our roster and how they view our roster, what they would do with our roster and making sure we're all comfortable with that plan.

Q. You listed Mike's numerous accomplishments, Super Bowls. He also had the streak of not having a win in the playoffs the last nine years. How do you characterize the Mike Tomlin era of the Pittsburgh Steelers?

ART ROONEY II: You know, it's been a winning era. As I said before, always in contention. I think when you start

with that, you have the opportunity to take the next step.

I can't explain kind of the more recent history there. It's hard to explain, given the overall track record. Frustrating for all of us, mostly for Mike. But all in all, I'll take being in contention every year and having a shot at it.

Q. Do you get a sense that the recent history, that lack of playoff success, was something that had been weighing on Mike, that factored into this decision?

ART ROONEY II: You know, I can't say. Again, I'd leave it to Mike to kind of talk about what factored into his decision. I've already said, to me it was more a family decision than a football decision. I'll leave it at that.

Q. You mentioned a couple times about every year having a chance. There's a school of thought a lot of people say, tear it down, build it back up or get a high draft pick. That seems to be a big talking point amongst media and fans and everything. Do you disagree with that philosophy, that you'd rather be every year right there?

ART ROONEY II: Yeah, I'm not sure why you waste a year of your life not trying to contend. Obviously your roster is what it is every year. It changes every year, so you deal with what you have every year and try to put yourself in position to compete every year.

Sometimes you have the horses, sometimes you don't. But I think you try every year.

Q. As the team president, the head of the organization, when you have your most valued employee telling you that he wants to resign, do you try to talk him out of it?

ART ROONEY II: I did not. He was pretty clear about what his intentions were, so I think we had a great conversation, and I understood where he was.

Q. I know you like Mike just being a good football coach. When he was talking about the reasons for it, you said you weren't shocked. Why? What did you see and what did you sense that you weren't shocked that he made this call?

ART ROONEY II: I mean, just a sense. I'm not sure I can get into a lot of details with you on it. But just, again, when you're going into 18, 19 years of a career like this -- he said it himself, he knows it's not going to go forever.

I think I knew. I think we all knew that we were getting toward the end.

Q. I know the standard is the standard has been a motto around here for a long time. What are you going to express to the new coach of what the standard is here in Pittsburgh?

ART ROONEY II: The standard is try to compete to win a championship every year.

Q. That being said, it's an unusual position. Usually teams looking for coaches are looking for coaches because it hasn't gone well. This is sort of not that case. Is the expectation whoever comes in that you guys should expect to be in contention right away?

ART ROONEY II: Like I said, I'm not going to say, well, we're going to take a couple years to figure this out and then we'll try to compete.

I think you try every year, and as I said, some years you have the horses to really get there, some years you don't. But you try every year, in my view.

Q. How do you think this impacts Aaron Rodgers at all?

ART ROONEY II: Yeah, look, Aaron came here to play for Mike, so I think it will most likely affect his decision.

Q. You mentioned horses; how important is it to find -- when you look at the quarterbacks left in the playoffs, seven of the eight are first-round guys. How important is that still on the priority list, regardless of who the coach is when you get to free agency and the draft?

ART ROONEY II: I'm sure the quarterback position will be an important part of that discussion with the candidates, and we'll have to develop a plan for going forward.

Q. You said leadership was a number one quality you look for in a head coach. How about innovation? How important is it for this coach to be innovative, not just in Xs and Os but also how you guys scout, how you guys prepare?

ART ROONEY II: I think every coach, I'm sure, we talk to will have a little different idea of his approach, and it'll be interesting to hear from people about that. You always learn something during this interview process.

Like I say, it'll be interesting to hear maybe different perspectives on how to approach it.

Q. With this change, do you expect it to be a total rebuild?

ART ROONEY II: You know, no. I don't know if it's a rebuild. It's a new coach, so there will be changes. We'll have to all get comfortable with kind of the plan. Whether you call it a rebuild or not, I don't like that word that much. We'll try to compete day one if we can.

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