

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

Monday, April 20, 2026

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Omar Khan

Mike McCarthy

Weekday Press Conference



Saturday when I meet with you guys, I don't know where we'll end up. Maybe we have ten. Maybe we have 14. I don't know. But having the 12 picks gives us a lot of flexibility and a lot of opportunities to do some things. We'll see where it goes.

Coach.

MIKE McCARTHY: Thank you, Omar. I think the biggest thing for us as a coaching staff, it's been great to get acclimated here to Pittsburgh. The draft process has been a lot of fun, frankly, for us, just the involvement.

I think the normal process that I've been exposed to is you have profiles, and you come together, and obviously the profiles that have been here for decades is something that we'll continue to adhere to.

I thought we got off to a really good start there. The coaches have kind of done double-time with the draft process, connecting with the personnel staff. I've really enjoyed Omar and his staff and the meetings that we've had.

But, you know, second part is we've been able to get ready for our players. We've had two weeks, and today we've had a lot of excellent work. I really appreciate the time and energy and the effort the players have put into the voluntary work, because at the end of the day, football is football, but everybody talks about it a little differently. Common language is he very important.

It takes time in the beginning. It's monotonous and tedious in those first months. I really applaud our players for being here and taking advantage of the opportunity to connect.

Lastly, I think any time Western Pennsylvania has a chance to show itself off, it's a great thing. So I know personally through family and friends and what the draft will bring to our great city and to show it off, it will be exciting. I had a chance to experience it for a day last year, and this is going to be awesome. So I'm definitely excited for the week and for Pittsburgh.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

OMAR KHAN: Great to see you guys. Appreciate you guys being here. I wanted to start off by just reiterating how excited we all are about the draft being here in Pittsburgh. It's long overdue.

I know personally I always tell people how great the region is and how great the people are here in the community. It's exciting that there's a lot of them that are going to experience it this week, so I'm excited. I'm sure we're going to make the NFL proud here in Pittsburgh.

A couple of things I want to touch base on before we take any questions. I know you are going to ask me on Aaron. We've had great communication with Aaron, and nothing has changed, but it's all been positive and good. I said this to you guys in March when we met. He knows how we feel about him, and we know how he feels about us.

Also, on Broderick, I know you'll ask me about Broderick. Nothing has changed with Broderick. He's still working to try to get back to where he needs to be. Nothing has changed there. No new information since we last spoke in March.

Also, I want to take a moment to just really thank Coach McCarthy and his staff for all the hard work they put into this draft process. This has been really difficult for them. I'm sure it's a lot. We haven't done this in a long time, but just seeing all that it's taken for them to get ready to get to this point from the football standpoint and obviously some personal stuff with getting acclimated to Pittsburgh, they've done a tremendous job. I've put a lot on their plate over the last six weeks, and I'm really proud about our process and how it came together.

Obviously I'd also like to thank my staff. Can't say enough about my scouting staff. They are second to none in my eyes, and they've really worked hard. Love where we're at.

Obviously we've got 12 picks. I don't know. Come



Q. Mike, you've gone through the draft process. Is this the formula, the execution process similar, different? How is it different here than others?

MIKE McCARTHY: A lot of similarities, but a lot the same. I could really probably say that about how you practice too. So, I mean, I think those are the things you always work through, and you appreciate what's here because of the continued success of the Pittsburgh Steelers for the last 50 years -- 70 years, 76 years, somewhere in there.

I think that is important, because I don't think you have the time or the energy, and I don't think it's energy well spent when you throw the baby out with the bath water. So I think it's important to have an understanding of what's here, and then obviously with Omar and our familiarity. So I thought it was pretty smooth the way it transitioned.

But, yes, every draft situation has been a little different, because you know, it has always stayed the same. Obviously the first and the second situations that we're in.

I really like the way the coaches connected with the personnel, because that's a process. That's not always super smooth, and sometimes it takes a little longer than you'd like, but I thought both staffs did a really good job.

Q. On the topic of potentially trading up, Omar, a question for you and then, Mike, if I can follow up with you on it, but Omar, with the bulk picks that you referenced that you have, what's the easier and more feasible scenario? Is it potentially moving up from where you are? Is it sticking and picking to maybe come back in again?

OMAR KHAN: That's a good question, Tim. I think it's probably too early to really say that. All options are on the table. We're open to whatever is best for the Steelers, but you know, I wish you could ask me that question as the draft progression. Obviously you won't be able to, but as the draft starts and we see where things are going, we'll make that determination.

Q. Mike, do you have a preference looking to move up to get a higher quality player, or are you a guy that wants to get your hands on as many people as possible? Are you one that prefers to load up with more people?

MIKE McCARTHY: I believe in draft and develop. I think that's the bloodline of how you grow your roster. I love the roster that's in place here. I think we have a very good mix of younger players and established veterans. Then to add a full draft class and obviously being above ten I think would be awesome personally.

I've always felt that the more players you have to develop, particularly younger players, I think definitely for the long-term is a good process. Frankly, my 18-year head coaching career speaks to that. I'm a big believer in draft and develop.

Q. What have you guys learned about this quarterback class in particular? It was originally supposed to be this great class. It's not being as great now. What have you learned about the guys that you've met with, and how excited are you to possibly get one of those guys?

MIKE McCARTHY: I think consistently what I've seen over the years is in every draft class, particularly quarterbacks, kind of comes to this at this time. I know it has for me personally. I think you've got to decide really what do you want, what do you believe in, what's the direction of your offense? I, as a quarterback coach, would like to work with any of these guys. I feel that way.

I believe in starting lines and floors and ceilings and things like that, but you know, where you play, it's nice to be out there on the field today. We were blessed with a nice wind. Just to remind you to get the ball in the outdoor, because I've been an indoor guy for five years.

I think you've got to decide what do you want, and I think this class has that. It's not the biggest class that I've seen, but I think you just have to decide really what you're looking for. There's guys there for that.

Q. Omar, a couple of other GMs have said they think the first round especially is going to have a lot of trades, it's going to be a chaotic one. Have you gotten that sense that there could be a lot of movement, especially on night one?

OMAR KHAN: I don't know where it's going to shake out. The one thing that's been interesting is that they have moved the first round from ten minutes to eight minutes. So naturally we've been having I think more conversations than we normally have to set parameters of what the value is necessarily, if you move up to this spot or trade back.

I think there's more conversation, but you know, until we get there, I'm not sure how it's going to go.

Q. How significant is losing that two minutes for those first round picks?

OMAR KHAN: It depends who you ask. I would love to have the ten minutes, but hey, it's the same for everybody else. So eight minutes is what it is. Those two minutes,

man, it feels like an eternity sometimes.

MIKE McCARTHY: You only get 40 seconds to call a play. Come on, it's not that bad (laughing).

Q. Mike, how do you feel about the eight minutes?

MIKE McCARTHY: It will be fine (laughing).

Q. Is there any position that's kind of jumped off the board that maybe surprised you throughout this process?

MIKE McCARTHY: Well, I think there's always positions where the volume, and I think clearly -- I'll let Omar speak to that, because I don't want to give up anything on the board here. Definitely I think there's some very deep positions, and it's always interesting to me on when the run starts on those positions, like last year with the offensive line, because kind of once it starts, it usually continues to go for quite some time.

That's something I think will be very consistent this year.

Q. Just to follow up on Broderick Jones, how much has he been able to do at practice, and how does the uncertainty potentially affect your draft plans?

OMAR KHAN: Today was day one of that, so obviously he's limited. It's early in the process, Mike. You know, we'll see where it goes.

MIKE McCARTHY: Yeah, I think the other thing too, the reality of it is what we're trying to accomplish right now. He's in a medical group. You have a number of guys that are in that group. We're really just trying to establish common language.

We went over the fundamentals of football today, so they haven't changed, how you talk about them, how you drill them, you know. We're just really taking the steps of starting at the beginning and going through it. He has participated, so that's not a problem.

Q. Is your board finalized yet? Are you doing anything different this year, because I know you ranked your top guys and not take into consideration what other teams are doing. Are you doing anything like that different this year?

OMAR KHAN: The process has been very similar.

Obviously we've got some pretty good ideas, and Mike has shared from other places he's been. For the most part, it's been the same.

Q. Omar, what part of the process is different this year? You guys have usually had a strong presence on the pro day circuits in years past. Maybe not as much this year. Is that part of the transition from Mike to Mike, or is that something you're going to de-emphasize?

OMAR KHAN: No, definitely not. It's just part of the transition. The timing of some of the pro days, and certain things didn't work out, but it's important.

Q. Mike, overall you talked about adding a bunch of a big rookie class, particularly quarterbacks because of their important because you work with them. Is there enough time, reps? You spread yourself thin if you have two development quarterbacks, young quarterbacks. Is that feasible the way you do things?

MIKE McCARTHY: Definitely. That speaks to the staff. There's a number of coaches that have been with me in the past. We pulled up some old Tom Orth quarterback film from 2006 today. So, yeah, we're fine as far as the training environment that we're trying to establish.

But, yeah, I think it's a position. We speak on it as being the most important position in football. I think it's important to always try to add to it if you can, but that's the fit.

Q. Omar, as long as you've been here you've never drafted a guy No. 1 who hasn't been in for a top 30, for as long as you've been here. Do you recall? I think Kevin once said that's never happened. Do you recall?

OMAR KHAN: You know what, I'm not sure, Jerry. I don't know. Some of that's probably coincidence or just comfort you feel, but I wouldn't say that our pick would have to be someone that was in for a 30-visit, yeah.

Q. Mike, did you ever pick anyone that wasn't in a top 30?

MIKE McCARTHY: Yeah, I've seen the 30 visits. It's been utilized three different ways. I think the way we utilize it here was awesome, because at the end of the day, you only have so much information on every prospect. There's different reasons to bring players in.

So I think that's -- I can't speak to the past, but you know, we're not just bringing in the guys we want to draft. I've been in three places, and that was never the absolute, but a lot of times there's medical questions. There's other things involved of why you bring a guy in.

Q. Smoke screens?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

MIKE McCARTHY: No.

OMAR KHAN: No. I'm not sure. I can tell you, these guys that were in here, they're in here for a reason. Smoke screen is not one of them. Good question, though.

Q. How does not having Aaron signed impact your draft?

OMAR KHAN: You know, we still evaluate it. That doesn't change our evaluation process. We're still putting the guys up where they need to be. You know, we'll just see how it shakes out.

Q. Omar, often you kind of talk maybe like you're calling teams maybe interested in other players. Is anybody calling you guys interested in players? I know you're not going to say who, but are you getting calls?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, it happens every year. It happens throughout the year, not just now. People will call and say, Hey, any interest in this player, in trading this player for this player? Or they'll call and say: Hey, we have this player we would consider. You guys interested?

There's a lot. I'll tell you this, I'd say maybe probably the less than 5% of those calls actually turn out to be something, but yeah, calls happen every week.

Q. On the excitement level of having the draft here in Pittsburgh, Mike, for you specifically, to have your first draft as the Steelers head coach in Pittsburgh, how much does that mean for you to have this experience with the draft right down the road here?

MIKE McCARTHY: It's great. Frankly, it will be more important to my family, as far as being able to enjoy the draft and so forth. We're going to be busy.

I laugh because my mother asks me every year if I'm going to the draft. I say, No, I'm going to be in the draft room again for year 33. We don't go to the draft.

But, no, I think it will be great for everybody to experience it.

Q. Have you learned enough about Spencer and Dylan Cook along with what you know about Hoffman on the left side of the line to feel -- comfortable is probably a poor word, but the board were to not fall, that you don't go high early with the offensive line. Do you think you have enough there?

MIKE McCARTHY: I would say confident would be the word I would use to describe our offensive line, because right now we have an excellent group of veterans. We have some young guys in there that are going to be good players for quite some time. I really like the way that blends together.

I think clearly O-line, D-line is something you always have to continue to try to add to it.

Q. You brought in Makai Lemon, one of the top receivers in the draft class. What was your guys' impression of how he presented himself to you and what he brought to the table?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, he was outstanding.

MIKE McCARTHY: He was.

OMAR KHAN: He really was. We had a chance to meet him. He was here and spent some quality time with him. It was excellent time spent.

Q. Omar, I want to follow up on Brooke's question about trades. You said there's been more internal conversation because of the shortened period or more conversation. Did you mean internal conversation or between GMs?

OMAR KHAN: No, no, no, between GMs, yeah.

Q. Omar, in terms of moving up in the draft, is there a cutoff point where you know you can't get past because it's just going to cost too much?

OMAR KHAN: That's a good question. So I'll say, yes, but the reality is when you're -- when it's draft day, you always want to just -- it never hurts to ask because you never know when someone is really dying to get out and maybe the value will be different than what you thought it would take. The same going backwards. You at least always inquire.

Q. You talk about there being a lot of conversations ahead of time. Is it your sense that this may be a draft that is easier to trade up in. It seems like there's a lot of teams that have been speculated that they might want to move down.

OMAR KHAN: It's similar about other years. There's a lot of conversations, and most of those don't even happen.

Q. When you put yourself roster together in September and there's a fourth- or fifth-year guy that can help you now as a backup as opposed to maybe a

sixth-rounder, rookie, who shows a lot of potential, how is the line that you walk there and putting the team together, final cuts?

MIKE McCARTHY: It's a line that you hope you have to walk, because those are good challenges to have when you're deciding on how many guys you can put on the 53. I've always viewed it as the 68-man roster. There's always the risk of getting a young player, particularly a sixth-round pick to the practice squad.

There's a number of filters, I would call them, you go through when you get in those types of spots. Frankly, everybody has to have two jobs. That's something when I look at players, position flex is very important. Particularly with the offensive line that's been asked, because you play 17 games. The ability for an offensive line to have five starters line up and play together, you know, week in and week out, it just doesn't happen as much anymore.

I think all those things come into play there. At the end of the day, it will be about value, because you do want to for the locker room -- if a player earns a spot on the 53, you like to see them rewarded. There is a chess match that Omar is very much at the point there when you talk about can you get this young guy to the practice squad?

I've been part of -- I've lost good players at that moment that you try to get to the practice squad, and I think every organization has looked at it a little differently on what type of player to have on practice squads. Since the pandemic, the practice squad has been utilized differently. I think that the number being as high as it is now was a real benefit to us as far as roster development.

Q. Mike, you talked a lot about inside-out flex at wide receiver. What does it take for wide receiver to have inside-out flex, rather than being a slack guy or a specific outsider?

MIKE McCARTHY: I think, number one, it's just like anything. You start with the physical traits to play inside and outside. I think historically when you talk about a slot receiver, the first thing you think about, can a guy run an option route, because that's really what slot receivers were known for.

In my experience I've always looked for the guy that was athletic enough and had the ability to win outside the numbers, we call it the Audubon, the ability to win out there, and then transfer that size and skill set inside. I think there's a huge benefit to that because he is capable to do more and, frankly, hopefully be a good option receiver because that's a big part of playing in the number two and three spot.

I just never ever viewed having a smaller receiver just to run slot plays. I don't like to play he that way, or I don't play that way, frankly, because our offensive system is built on making a conservative successful.

When you have to run concepts in the pass game dictated on this receiver can do this and this receiver can do that, then you don't have the ability to move around them as much. So when you can move players around, now you challenge the defense, and you can create more matchups and you keep things simpler for the quarterback.

Sorry for the long answer, but that's how I view the slot.

Q. Where did the Audubon come from?

MIKE McCARTHY: Actually, Joe Whitt. That's what he called it out there. I think like anything, when you are teaching, we call them buckets, we put things in the buckets. You got the Audubon, and you get the middle of the field. The corner route is heaven. Sevens are heavens. Seven route is a corner route. You have things like that that you put those things together.

Q. Omar, what has to happen for you to feel on Saturday like, hey, we really got this one, this was a good draft for us? Have you had those in the past at the end of draft day?

OMAR KHAN: I trust our process. I'm confident saying right now that when we're done on Saturday, we'll have gotten 10, 12, 14 players, whatever it is. I feel really good about where we're at right now and all the work we put into it and how the board is stacked.

I wish the draft was right now. We're ready for it. I trust the process. It's been good.

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