

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

General Manager Omar Khan

Coach Mike McCarthy

Draft Day Press Conference



OMAR KHAN: He said it too, man. This guy's a Steeler. With that, excited. Gives us a lot of options on the offensive line. Like I said, can't wait. Coach?

MIKE McCARTHY: I'm very excited about Max. Our offensive line coaches are bouncing off the wall. I know it's a little late. You guys look like you're dragging a little bit. Sorry to hold you in there.

I can't tell you enough about him -- we don't have enough big men up front. He's great for us. A stud of a young man. Throughout the process, you heard about him a little bit early, and he just kept growing and growing and growing through the evaluation.

As we really winded down this week, he frankly just kept climbing up our board. We were just real excited that he was there. I think it's an excellent pick for us. He'll be a great addition to our offensive line.

Q. Omar, is the pick any reflection on Broderick Jones?

OMAR KHAN: I mean, sure, it's a little bit of a concern. You guys have heard me talk about that. You always hear me talk about versatility too, and we've got guys on the offensive line that can play different positions on the offensive line. As I mentioned, we have options.

Q. Is there a possibility of moving Fautanu in the back there?

MIKE McCARTHY: I think all those things are discussions that will occur after the draft. We had two really good days Monday and Tuesday, the work with our men, and frankly we looked at as much position flex throughout the individual drills that we did work with the offensive line.

We even had some -- not team drills, but group activity that we worked a number of the offensive linemen both left and right. It's part of being a new staff. They're excited about it. We wanted to see what this weekend brings, and we're off to a helluva start for our offensive line room.

Position flex is huge. It's bigger than ever in the NFL. 17 games is real. And to add Max to this group is -- I can't tell you how excited we are with the pick.

Q. Mike, would that include guard as an option possibly with Max?

MIKE McCARTHY: No, we'll start him off at tackle. We want to work with him. I know our line coaches had a Zoom with him the other day. It's nice to see it come together, in this evaluation starting with Omar and the personnel staff.

He's made a huge impression on us, and I think he's a great fit for us.

Q. So right tackle only? Is that where he's going to start?

MIKE McCARTHY: Yeah, I mean, I just talked about position flex. He's part of the conversation.

Q. Would Troy move to guard two in that conversation?

OMAR KHAN: Lots of options there. We've got options.

Q. How much do you feel he's tapped into his potential at this point?

OMAR KHAN: He's just getting started. He hasn't played a lot of football in his life, and he's only going to get better.

Q. Is this a challenging position. What have you learned about what it takes to develop a tackle so he's ready sooner than later to step in and start?

MIKE McCARTHY: It's a pretty general question, but specifically to tonight, that's why it's important to get Max here, see where he fits. It's not as much as just what he's

done at Arizona State. It's really the techniques and how we're going to play and things like that.

When we get everybody here, which we will do in two weeks, we'll have a better idea exactly what he needs to work on.

Q. Mike, he moved up throughout the process, Senior Bowl, combine, that kind of stuff. What specifically made an impression?

OMAR KHAN: He won through the process, he really did. He won everywhere he was -- the Senior Bowl, the combine, the interaction we had through our Zooms. It just felt right.

Q. Was it always offensive line, or how the board broke brought you to the offensive line?

OMAR KHAN: You trust your board, but the way it shook out, yeah, it just brought us to the position. It was the right pick for us.

Q. How much did Philadelphia trading up, jumping you guys, cause you guys to pivot with that pick?

OMAR KHAN: I think all those things that happen around us affect the conversations, but it's just the draft.

Q. You mentioned the impression he made on you. What was it specifically in your interactions with him that made you feel he's a good fit here?

MIKE McCARTHY: I'll just talk from the coach's perspective. You've got to remember Omar and the personnel staff, they've been working on this for 12 months.

We're a new staff, you get in place, so we're later to the game. I didn't know a whole lot about Max two months ago. So as you go through the process with the staff, he's someone that I know just between myself and the offensive line coaches, we've been talking a lot about him lately.

Q. Mike, how do you see his background in soccer and basketball before he committed to football show up in his footwork and his game?

MIKE McCARTHY: I think the biggest thing, when you watch linemen play, you want to see them strike and stick, and with that the balance and the footwork, his ability to stay alive on second and third reaction when he does engage, I think it's all over the video.

Q. Talking about flexibility with your offensive

linemen, is that due to -- the injuries the NFL kind of split across the board. (Indiscernible) so you put more people in your offense and keep them on in case of injury?

MIKE McCARTHY: Definitely. I think it's value that you definitely look into, especially when you get down to the 53-man roster. It's one thing for your nine, ten, however many linemen you keep each year, to play on the 53, but how do they get up on the 48?

Position flex is very, very important. The second, third, center, fourth tackle, those are all important conversations. Those are the conversations you have internally. Any time I know, from my perspective as a coach in the evaluation process, I hold position flex, the value of it very high.

Q. Omar, do you see center moving up, or was it always the plan to stay where you were at at 21?

OMAR KHAN: I mentioned the other day we field calls, we all talk. There were some opportunities to move up. There were opportunities to move back. We just didn't want to trade away from this player. It just felt good.

Q. Was there a moment where he really got on your radar? Can you remember like a moment where he really stood out to you?

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, I would say really when we were going through our February draft meetings, that's really when he -- and the scouts came -- at the Senior Bowl, the scouts came back, and we started talking about the guys that were there. We got to our February meetings, and that's when he really grabbed our attention there.

He just kept getting better and better for us with him.

Q. Omar, since Andy came on in '22, you guys spent a lot of early draft capital on offensive linemen. How reflective is this of kind of his entire strategy he had at previous destinations?

OMAR KHAN: You'd have to ask Andy that question, but I think from day one we've said those big guys are important to us.

Q. Omar, Villanueva is similar in experience and size. Did you see any of that?

OMAR KHAN: You said who?

Q. He was inexperienced and tall.

OMAR KHAN: From the experience standpoint, maybe a

little bit, but Al was 6'9". Yeah, this kid's -- football is ahead of him. He's only going to get better and better the more he plays. He's such a talented football player.

He hasn't played a lot of football, and I'm just excited what the future holds for him with us.

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