

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Omar Khan

Mike McCarthy

Draft Day Press Conference



way these guys just worked so hard. Man, I can't thank you guys, Coach, for this process.

I know it's hard moving to Pittsburgh and lots of stuff going on personally and getting stuff ready on the football side and you've got me throwing a lot of stuff your way. Lots of effort from the coaching staff too. Everyone else in the organization, we have a great organization here, great people.

OMAR KHAN: Awesome weekend, it truly was. I just want to start by really congratulating the city and the people in this city for the draft here and how it turned out. I can't tell you guys how awesome the feedback has been from the people that I talked to and all the excitement down there.

From politicians, the people -- obviously I can't tell you guys what Art Rooney and Dan Rooney did for this. It's been great to see. Everybody from the league office, the Commissioner and his staff, it's just -- I can't tell you how -- again, I keep using that word "awesome." It was awesome. It truly has been.

To conclude with that excitement with Eli, I wasn't expecting to see that on TV. You can't help but get emotional when you saw that at the end. Truly, truly, truly a tremendous weekend for the city of Pittsburgh, for the Steelers, and I think for the NFL.

Hopefully we get it back here again. Enjoyed every minute of it.

Before I take any questions, I wanted to thank my personnel staff. I got to tell you guys, in my opinion, my staff is second to none. I'm so proud of these guys. They worked so hard for me and for the organization. They do a tremendous job.

We have such a good process. I truly love our process. We had a great board. When you have a good process and you trust your board like we do, sometimes the draft those curveballs your way and things just sort of sort out from there when that happens if you have that trust.

I can't say enough about those guys. I can't do this without them. They're awesome.

I also want to thank Mike and his coaches. Man, these guys, the time and effort they put into this. We haven't done this in, what, 19 years with a new staff here, and the

Really pleased with how things turned out. We drafted -- what did we end up with, ten picks? I'm not going to talk about each one individually right now. I'm sure you guys will fire off some questions. That ending was tremendous too. I'm sure you guys all saw it. That was pretty cool to watch.

Q. The offensive-heavy draft, was that kind of reflective of having Mike and his background and what you want to do on offense?

OMAR KHAN: It just sort of came that way. That's how the draft sorted itself out. We didn't go in there saying, hey, we're going to draft nine offensive guys and one defensive guy.

Like I mentioned, you trust your board, trust the process, and it all sorts out. That's just sort of how it turned out.

Q. In that first round pick, we haven't talked to you since the reports came out, you guys have been on the phone with Makai. Can you take us through the curveball, take us through the moments that kind of ensued after that?

OMAR KHAN: When the draft happens, there's a lot of excitement that goes on. There was no ill intent, made the call. As I mentioned, when you have a good process and you trust your board and the draft throws curveballs at you in every round. Trust me, it happens throughout the draft, some public, some not. Things just sort of take care of themselves.

Q. After taking a swing at a receiver there initially at 21, how do you feel you guys pivoted to address that position? Mike, how do you feel your room is now

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after adding the guys that you did today?

MIKE McCARTHY: I think Omar really has answered the question. You have to trust your board. I've always looked at the draft board similar to calling a huge game but obviously with a lot more energy. So much time and energy goes into putting that board together.

This draft, this weekend was very refreshing when you see need hit value, when value hits need. When you get down to those picks, you're usually talking about two, three, four players, but it really did, we did not go into the draft saying we're going to take so many offensive players or so many defensive players. We wanted to raise the level of our talent.

We're aware of positions that we would probably want to add to, and that's the case with receiver. He was right there. That's a great pick right there.

Q. How did you feel about the room after you got Bernard in the second round?

OMAR KHAN: We feel -- obviously we traded up to get Germie. I think that kind of speaks to how we feel about him. I think he's going to add to the room. Kaden, that's on Coach. He's going to have some fun with him, I think. Obviously he's going to help us in the return game, which was an area of need for us.

Q. Adding Drew Allar in the third round, what kind of value do you feel like you got with him? What are you getting with him that made him an attractive pick?

MIKE McCARTHY: It's about the quarterback room. I've always approached it that way. I learned it that way as a young coach. It's about training the whole room together. We had an opportunity to get on the field last week for two days with Mason and Will, and now we add Drew.

This is the goal. This is the outlook. We talked about it in my interview. Just from a philosophical standpoint, we want to have a healthy quarterback room that we're always developing. We're always developing. It's the most important position maybe in sports.

It's very difficult. There's a lot that goes into that. We have a way of how the quarterback will be trained here. I've done it a long time. It's great to have two really young guys that I'm excited about.

Q. Does drafting Drew affect what you expect to hear from Aaron or what you want to hear from Aaron?

MIKE McCARTHY: No, not at all. This is about developing

the room and trying to make the room as deep as we possibly can.

Q. If you do get an answer from Aaron and he does decide to come here, would you be comfortable with two guys who haven't taken a snap in the NFL as backups, or would you need to keep Mason to give you guys that have experience?

MIKE McCARTHY: These are all hypotheticals that really won't change what I already said. I will coach the hell out of that room. I have a lot of confidence. I have history and experience that I will give everything I can to any quarterback in that room.

We want to grow the quarterback room. We don't want to just rely on one quarterback.

Q. In terms of the size, the arm strength, the hands, is he the AFC North quarterback you've been talking about for a while now?

MIKE McCARTHY: I think the biggest thing is you recognize where you play. You're going to have eight home games. It's no different with the return game. The return game was a very important outlook for Omar and I from the first day we started talking about the draft.

Q. With Drew Allar, was he the guy you wanted on day 2?

MIKE McCARTHY: Definitely. I think like anything I believe in first impressions. I've had a chance to watch him play, meet him at the Combine, and really all the quarterbacks that came into the meeting room did very well.

I liked everything about him. I think he's young. I think he's got a lot of room for growth. He's a young man that can throw the ball with the best of them, and that's a great starting point to have.

Q. What are the challenges in having two young quarterbacks and giving them time to be able to develop?

MIKE McCARTHY: CBA rules is the only challenge we have. Everybody coaches under them, but it's a good place to be. I was very impressed with Will last week. I know he's a good athlete.

Tom and I had a chance to break down -- we do a thing called quarterback profile. So we had a chance to videotape that on Tuesday. That's something we'll share with Mason and Will on Monday.



There's a training regimen that's involved, but we'll stick to it, and I'm excited about both those guys.

Q. What about roster rules too? Omar, you said on Monday you'd like to have four. What are the machinations that you can kind of use to your advantage to try to hold onto four?

OMAR KHAN: Four quarterbacks?

Q. In the practice squad, how do you do that?

OMAR KHAN: Once we head into the season? Yeah, those are all options. In this league there's a natural attrition that happens once you get into training camp and injuries happen, and that sort of sorts itself out. The league is set up where you have options and opportunities to keep your best players.

Q. Have you ever had a service academy guy, and how do you envision Heidenreich?

MIKE McCARTHY: Obviously I have a lot of respect for what he's done the last four years. We talk about how many downs a player plays. Does he play all four downs, his ability to play multiple positions? I think Eli definitely brings that to the table.

I met with Angelichio briefly earlier. I think we're going to open up the playbook a little bit.

Q. The emotion that came with drafting Eli and the crowd going crazy. For you, what's it like to draft a Pittsburgh native guy and see him walk across the stage with this Pittsburgh crowd?

MIKE McCARTHY: I think everybody in the room felt it. I felt it. I couldn't imagine what it would have been to walk out there like that. Just really proud of him.

I think the biggest thing for me as a coach is to create opportunities for all these guys, and especially for Eli.

Q. When you enter the draft with 12 draft picks, that's a lot of capital. What was your plan to try to leverage that to your advantage, and how do you think you executed it?

OMAR KHAN: I think the execution went pretty good. Really happy with the players that we acquired. We went into it, as I mentioned to you guys, I didn't know if we were going to end up with 10 or 14 picks. We were open to anything. There were some good players in this draft, there really was. We got 10 good ones.

I'd like to tell you that, hey, we're going to end up with 10 or 9 or 8 and 4 first rounders, but you sort of have to let it come to you, and you trust your process.

Q. With a player like Kaden, whose contributions have primarily come on special teams, how do you try to balance the value that that provides compared to maybe depth in another position or a guy that could be a potential future starter?

OMAR KHAN: His résumé speaks for itself. He's very productive in that area in college. Just look at his stats, I think that speaks for itself.

It was a need position. He was the top guy in that area, in my opinion. For us, it's the value we put on him. We feel really good about where we got him.

Q. Max is a case, since he took up football so late, that you see a higher ceiling? Is there still ascension in terms of where his game could be?

OMAR KHAN: Absolutely. Absolutely. He's so impressive. You guys got to meet him yesterday. There's a lot to like there and a lot of growth to come. I'm excited for him being a Pittsburgh Steeler for years and years to come.

Q. I know Mike was giving you grief about it, but how did the eight-minute clock thing come into play? Was that at all an issue with the thing with Makai? Did you have time to go back to the Cowboys and say, hey, can we swing something here?

OMAR KHAN: It was a non-issue. I probably made more out of it than I should have the other day. It was fine.

Q. What were your first impressions of Jennings? He's a pretty impressive guy. He would stand out as any offensive lineman when you look at him.

MIKE McCARTHY: We love his hair. I'm sure the marketing department likes it even more. He's impressive. I'm sure James Campen and the whole offensive line is ecstatic. I think it's anything, when you watch him, whether on Zoom or meet him in person, you go through the process, the first time you may meet him is at the Combine, but when he walked through the door, he's a very, very impressive young man.

Q. What stood out to you guys about Gabriel Rubio?

MIKE McCARTHY: I just think, number one, you watch the way he plays, and you look at his skill set. He's a

Pittsburgh Steeler defensive lineman. I think he's an outstanding fit for the 3-4. I thought that was a no-brainer pick right there.

Q. Likewise, fullback still important in your offense, and your thoughts on Riley?

MIKE McCARTHY: I think, when you look at Riley, his versatility jumps off the charts. When you go back to Wisconsin, he plays in the two-back offense and played in the three-surface offense where he played the fullback up on the line, all the movement ability. He played a full year in a run and shoot type one back, so he has a one-back running ability too.

I cannot tell you how impressed I was with him and his story to leave Wisconsin and to go to Indiana and be a captain on the National Championship team. This is an outstanding pick. On top of that, I know I'm excited about it. I love the two-back offense. There's a lot of things that you start in this league in the '90s where two-back offense was a primary component with normal down and distance. Now to be able to bring something like that back, it's something I did a little in Dallas down there in '23-'24. To be able to have that.

Nobody's happier than Danny Crossman. He's a special teamer. He'll have a chance to be a leader captain-type on special teams. I thought that was an excellent pick there by Omar.

Q. On the offensive line, you have a lot of youth, a lot of positional flexibility, and also the question mark about his health. How do you go about sorting out where all these moving pieces fit together?

MIKE McCARTHY: Great question. There's different ways of doing it. I've done left side. I've done right side. We have to look at the experience of these guys, how we bring these rookies into the place.

Those discussions have started, and frankly until we sit down with the players, I'm not going to sit here and talk about it openly until then.

You want to create an opportunity for everybody to have a chance to line up, but, boy, the longer I do this, it takes the whole group to get through the season. How we train them together in a position flex will be a big part of our decisions on how we start.

Q. Omar, you ended up drafting a lot of guys that were younger but also had multi-year experience. Was that kind of a concentrated effort to get guys that had multiple years of starting, but also 23 and younger? I

think the only guy that was 23 and older was Wetjen out of your picks.

OMAR KHAN: You kind of trust your board. We didn't go in saying we want this age group or this amount of experience. It's just sort of we trusted our board, and it came to us that way.

MIKE McCARTHY: I appreciate your question. I didn't realize that until you said it.

OMAR KHAN: That's good homework.

Q. You've got a 200-pound guy that runs a 4.3. Is that something where you look at that skill set -- the safety you took in the first round pick. The size and speed.

OMAR KHAN: Yeah, size and speed, value at that spot. Our scouts really liked him. Just special teams contributor. A lot to like there.

Q. Is Eli a running back that catches the ball, or is he more of a receiver? How do you use him?

MIKE McCARTHY: Both.

Q. You said open the playbook.

MIKE McCARTHY: He's definitely a no position flex. He can play from the slot. He can play from the backfield. You see him out displaced.

I think anything, when you put a young man in the receiver room, he has to play all three positions. That's the way we want to play. That's the way it's been introduced the past couple weeks. But his ability also to play from the backfield and just the diversity is important.

Like I said, you can't do everything -- Randall Cobb. I've had different players in the past. We'll definitely look at those things.

OMAR KHAN: I wanted to mention one thing in my intro. She's going to not be happy with it, but Maureen Mannion, our assistant, she's retiring. She's been here since my first day in 2001. She's very special to all of us down there. She's probably not going to be happy that I said this, guys, but I want to publicly say how much we're going to miss her and appreciate all of her hard work through the years. She's been a great asset for us, and we're going to miss her.

If you get a chance to see her, I know some of you guys know her, just congratulate her.

MIKE McCARTHY: She's a Mannion. I played for her
uncle. That's the right stuff.

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