

**Coach Mike Tomlin
Press Conference
November 13, 2007**



Coach Mike Tomlin: Good afternoon. Two days later, it is still great to get a win. I'll give a quick game review from Sunday's performance. We were pleased with the way we dealt with the adversity, some of which was self-inflicted, but that is the nature of football. I like what this team showed us in terms of it's mettle in the second half with marching back. Some of the contributions are well documented. Ben (Roethlisberger) is a special guy. He has the opportunity to be a particularly special quarterback because of what he does in terms of moving our football team. James Harrison played well. Defensively, I thought we got stiff in the second half. There is plenty of acknowledgement to go around. The reality is that we are a 7-2 team. We fall short of perfection, I think, in a lot of areas. But we will accept where we are at the time being and we will move forward. At this point and time, at least I am willing to acknowledge that we had a critical stretch of games there, from a division opponent standpoint, we did. When the schedule comes out, the hair on the back of your neck stands up a little bit looking at that run. I like to congratulate the team on doing a nice job of addressing those one game at a time. When you play known opponents, it is an emotional game and there are heated rivalries in that stretch. To muster the energy and enthusiasm to kick it up and go 3-0 in that run, I think speaks potentially to what we are capable of. Again, it is no time for us to breathe a sigh of relief. Our next challenge is right around the corner. We acknowledge that. But that was a nice run for us, and we move forward.

On the injury front, we have the normal bumps and bruises associated with playing ball at this time of year, there are potentially some guys could miss a little work at the beginning of the week, Ben (Roethlisberger) being one of the them, Willie Parker being one of them, Deshea Townsend potentially being one of them. But those are injuries that are normal at this time of year. Hopefully we will get those guys rolling and we will be prepared for those guys to participate this weekend. Guys that are potentially capable of missing the game are Jerame Tuman and Ryan Clark. There is no news on their situations. Those guys are essentially out at this point. There has been no real progress on either front to the point where those guys are capable of playing. We will continue to support those guys and monitor their situations and when the information does change, of course we will give it to you. Andre Frazier has a groin strain and it is going to make him potentially questionable for this game. We will see what he looks like as the week unfolds, but that groin injury does make him a question mark. LaMarr Woodley has a hamstring strain and his injury makes him questionable for the game. Those are two young guys who need practice reps in order to perform, so they are questionable and their ability to participate during the week is going to dictate their status for the game. We will take those two issues day to day. But for the most part, we have no complaints in the injury department. All of us are less than 100 percent at this time of the year and the people that we compete against, we make no excuses along those lines. We will take the men that are healthy and march into the weekend.

Specifically, as we look forward to the Jets, they are a team that is hungry for a win. They are coming off a bye. Teams that come off a bye always create a cause for concern as you prepare because of the unforeseen. Again, as always, the issue will be us and our preparation. They do have some quality players, some people that we have to be prepared against. Thomas Jones at tailback is a legitimate ball totter in this league. He is a talented guy. I worked with him in Tampa Bay, I competed against him in the NFC North. When he was in Chicago, I was in Minnesota. He is capable of winning football games. He does a lot of things well. He can catch out of the back field. He can be a perimeter runner. He is a good zone scheme runner because of his ability to cut the ball back. Leon Washington is a great third down back that they have, a young guy, emerging player, they throw him a lot of passes. His hands are excellent. He is a legitimate,

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of course, kick returner and a punt returner. Given our performance in that area of our football team here recently, we better be prepared to be at our best in terms of getting after him. He needs no assistance in terms of what he is capable of doing. I think his stats speaks for themselves. This guys has returned three kicks this year. He is a dangerous player. At wide receiver, (Jerricho) Cotchery and Laveranues Coles are a great one-two punch. Both guys have caught a bunch of passes. Laveranues Coles has six touchdowns, Cotchery has +50 catches regardless of who plays quarterback for them, those guys find a way to perform. They are legit receivers. We have to be prepared to get after those guys. They have young quality men up front, D'Brickshaw Ferguson at left tackle is a very good player, a young player, highly talented draft pick (Nick) Mangold at center is the same. Defensively, they are a very young football team but they have some young talented players leading them. David Harris has stepped in as inside linebacker and is doing a heck of a job since (Jonathan) Vilma has gone down. He is a guy that we knew a lot about in the draft and had a great deal of respect for. He is a thumper. He has a bunch of tackles, he can find the ball, he is an instinct player. He is very physical. We have to be prepared to deal with him. (Darrelle) Revis at corner, he is what we thought he was. He is playing good ball for them, holding down the corner spot as is Hank Poteat. At safety, Kerry Rhodes is a young safety as there is in football.

As usual, we will go into the week focused on the things that we need to, getting our game moving in the direction that we want to move it. There are so many areas that we need to improve in and we acknowledge that. But at the same time, it doesn't weigh us down. We take each day of this journey the way we should, and that is as an opportunity to get better. We realize the challenges that lie ahead for us and we have to prepare ourselves to meet them. I will answer any questions at this time.

How did the defense play better in the second half without halftime changes?

Sometimes people tend to panic when they are in the face of adversity and they want to change. I will always be resistant to that, because I will always trust our men and I trust our preparation. The reality is that Cleveland made some plays in that first half of that football game because they have good people. Schematically, I thought we were sound. Fundamentally and technically I thought we were sound. We were close on a lot of plays and they converted a lot of third downs in that first drive. There was a defender right there and we tackled guys immediately. Some of the first downs were converted on second (downs), as was the (Joe) Jurevicius stretching out and moving the chains. They got some short fields and put some points on the board. A lot of times when you change, you create new problems. We knew what our issues were, we just needed to continue to do what we were doing and do it a little better. That is what we did.

How do you plan to address kickoff coverage issues?

I am taking a similar approach to our coverage units as I did when it happened with our defense. Just because things go bad, I don't want to have a knee-jerk reaction and be emotional. We are not in that business. We are professionals. We have some guys that need to do a little better job at shedding blockers and tackling. We have to do a better job at getting them in position to do that. There won't be drastic changes. That is not how we operate. We respect the process and we understand there is a fine line between success and failure in this league, in all phases. We are not doing really well right now, but the answers are probably right in front of us and the adjustments are probably minor. That is the way we are approaching it. I think everybody knows

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we need to get better in that area and I think we will get a concerted effort. I think we will get the best the men have to offer and then we will move one.

What will you do if Andre Frazier and LaMarr Woodley can't play? Will you put starters there?

Those are possibilities. It is early in the week. We will take a look at all of those. We'll have more information as the week unfolds. At this point in time, I will always proceed with caution in terms of the men that are questionable for the game. I don't like to rule them out because medical expertise doesn't always tell you about the will of a man. We will give those guys the opportunity to see if they can perform for us.

Has James Harrison played less on special teams?

He has. He has been pretty stable on punts. In terms of punt protection and things of that nature, he is as good as we have. We have spelled him some on kickoffs, because he is playing so much defense. Those are decisions you have to make and the things that happen because of the decisions you make are what they are. Those aren't excuses. The 11 we put out there for kickoff coverage represent us. Whether or not James Harrison is out there covering kickoffs for us, the standard of expectation does not change.

Is Lawrence Timmons doing well on special teams?

Individually, we all kind of mirror our collective performance. I have a tough time saying anybody is doing well on kickoff coverage right now, including me. We accept that. We look forward to having the opportunity to improve on that area this week. The football gods are always kind to you. When you are struggling in an area, we get presented with the opportunity to defend the best guy in the world at returning kicks right now, Leon Washington. Great and I mean that. This game and this profession is about challenges and response. I look forward to seeing what we are willing and capable to do in that area this week.

How do you guard against a letdown after going 3-0 versus Cincinnati, Baltimore and Cleveland?

I think it was more about the stretch and now that we have pushed through that stretch, it is in our rearview. We have all eyes moving forward. We are just beginning this fight. The things we have done at this point have put us in position to compete and that is the reality of it. I think everybody in our lock room understands and knows that. Everybody on our coaching staff definitely does. We are just beginning to get in the mix of this thing. We have a lot of questions that we have about ourselves that we have to answer and we look forward to doing that. This week is going to provide another one of those opportunities. Anytime you play on the road in this league, the ultimate parity league, you have an issue. We are going to New York to play the Jets. It's a tough place to play and I am sure it will be a hostile environment. We better be at our best or close to if we expect to be successful.

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Please talk about Chad Pennington and Kellen Clemens.

I don't think their games are that different. First and foremost, I think they are both very capable guys. I think the change was made simply because they felt like a change needed to be made. They needed to potentially spark something, because they hadn't necessarily had a great deal of success as a team. A lot of the time quarterbacks are measured by team success. In this business we all acknowledge that as coaches and quarterbacks. They are trying to get something going. Chad Pennington is a good quarterback. Clemens is a good quarterback. We are expecting to see Clemens, but we could potentially see both. The reality is that schematically they don't change much when either guy is in there.

Do you kick the ball to Leon Washington?

I'm not going to make any Lane Kiffin declarations. We'll decide later in the week.

What happened on the 100-yard kickoff return?

It is a head scratcher. I am still trying to figure out what happened. The guy missed played the ball and he thought it was going to roll into the end zone. It didn't so he fielded it. He made the best of his situation and it was at our expense. One thing I don't want to do, in terms of what happened with us covering kicks, is devalue the performance of Josh Cribbs. He had a great football game. He is a talent. There are a bunch of talented kick returners in this league, of course led by Devin Hester, but he is probably one of the guys that doesn't get enough attention for what he is capable of doing. That being said, we missed tackles. We can't miss tackles. You miss tackles, great people are going to make you pay for it and he did.

Are you happy with your punt and kickoff returns?

No, I'm not. I'm not happy with much that is going on right now. We seek perfection. We have to do a better job in a lot of areas.

Did you think Braylon Edwards catch was a good one?

I'm still not certain he got both feet down. I coach the game, I don't officiate. We have to learn to live with the decisions that are made in regards to that element of the game. The reality is, regardless of what they decide, we have to move on. We will not acknowledge that officiating calls decide the outcome of games. The quality of our play decides the outcome of our games. That is the ruling they made on the field. We accept it and we move on.

Does the inconsistency in replay bother you?

When you acknowledge that how games are officiated decides the outcome, you're not putting enough responsibility on yourself and what you do. We like to keep the focus on ourselves and what we do. Whatever decisions we make, in terms of calling the game and how they call the game is a decision, we have to be professional. We have to get a sense of how the game is being called and play accordingly.

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Have you always been in favor of replay?

Yes, I have.

Assess Darrelle Revis and is cornerback a tough position for a rookie?

When you are a young guy in this league, at every position, you are going to have a bull's-eye on your back. That is part of it and probably even more so as a corner. He is wearing it well and I am sure he would like to do better, as would a lot of players, most players that are competitive people, particularly the type of guy he is, with the kind of talent he has and the football character he has and getting to know him leading up to the draft. That is just the nature of the beast. That is why so many times, particularly at the cornerback position, you will see a corner leading the league in interceptions, because he is going to get an opportunity to play footballs. He is doing a nice job. We respect him. We respect him as a football player.

Are the Jets dangerous because they are 1-8?

The Jets are dangerous because they are a NFL football team. Everybody has legitimate personnel that can hurt you. We give them the benefit of the doubt that everybody comes to play, regardless of record. Reputation and resume mean very little in this league. That is why everybody tunes in on weekends to watch these football games. That is the reality of it. That is why we choose to focus the way we focus; on what we do. We'll assume the Jets will be ready to play. We will assume they are capable of beating us, because they are. They have good people and they have good coaches. We have to get ready to do what we do.

Does Willie Parker need to change shoes or style because of the grass at Heinz Field?

If I start talking about footing and the field, in regards to the quality of his play, those would be excuses. I like to keep a discussion between me and Willie on what he sees in his tracks and decision making. We have to get better in that regard. We have to get better at sustaining blocks for him. We are running the ball effectively. He did run the ball for 100 yards. I am excited that he feels like he left some yards out there, because I believe he did. We will go back to work this week, in search of the ceiling. In regards to the surface and field, these guys are professionals. I trust that they will put on appropriate footwear on to play football. In regards to the field, as long as we deal with it better than our opponent, I like it.

Might you use Santonio Holmes as a punt returner?

Not at this time, no.

How do you see camaraderie on the team?

We won three games in a row and we are 7-2. Usually when you win, camaraderie is great. I am more concerned about the mutual respect in the locker room, the level of accountability in the locker room and the standards that these men hold each other to in the locker room. Those are the things that concern me, because I think those are the things that push us towards the quality of our performance as we move forward to meet the challenges that await us. That is my focus. Those are the things I relay to them. Camaraderie and things of that nature are good. These guys

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spend a lot of time together. They put a lot of time into what they do. You will find that the teams that are losing have great team camaraderie. I know a lot of times we like to point to that as a defining factor in the outcome of football games and how people play. The reality is, it's about accountability. They have to be accountable to each other. It is about mutual respect. It's about respecting the job that everybody does and respecting the fact that everybody has to put their best foot forward and that this is the ultimate team game. I keep the focus on accountability and respect, as oppose to camaraderie.

Did Cleveland bring more pressure than you expected?

No, they didn't bring it more than we anticipated. They did bring some pressure. They were able to get home a few times and they did a nice job in that area.

Did they bring a lot of cornerbacks?

One time specifically I remember they brought the corner, because they sacked Ben (Roethlisberger). If there was an abnormal amount of pressure from the secondary I couldn't say that, no.

How fickle is the league year to year?

It is, but to me that is what I enjoy about this league. That is what I enjoy about competing in this league, because it is. It is very fragile. I say it all the time. This is the ultimate parity league and it is. Everybody has good players. You have to respect that element of it. The thing that is exciting to me, as we move forward, is that I know our guys do respect that element of it. We better.

Do you feel good about your quarterback?

It takes all 53, but I'm glad we have the quarterback that we have.

Do you get nervous when Ben Roethlisberger runs?

These guys are competitors. They compete and you have to feel comfortable with that on some level. Ben is a capable guy from a running standpoint. He is. The funny thing and I was thinking this yesterday. Probably the most impressive run of the game was Ben and the most impressive pass of that game was Willie Parker, because I'm glad he put that halfback pass in the red zone where he put it; where the defensive guys couldn't get it. That's football. We do what we have to do to win. We needed Ben to run to a certain degree, for us to win and he did it and we were able to get one.

Is it his hip that will limit him this week?

It's a lot of things. It is his hip, his shoulder. He is banged up a little bit. That is the nature of it.

Is it still Willie Parker's knee?

Yes.

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What is wrong with Deshea Townsend?

Deshea has a little swelling in his ankle. It should subside. It may limit him in the early part of the week.

When did Deshea Townsend get hurt?

I don't know when exactly it happened. I know Deshea is a competitor. I know if he missed time, he didn't miss much.

Where was Darrelle Revis on your draft list?

He was high on our list. He would have been in our considerations had somebody else picked (Lawrence) Timmons.

How disruptive is replay to rhythm of a game, particularly in the Indianapolis game this weekend?

I acknowledge that it is disruptive to rhythm and all that stuff. When the ball is snapped you have to execute. I am sure Coach (Tony) Dungy doesn't make excuses about that, in terms of the outcome of that game, so I won't help him.

Can you get something extra from a comeback win?

I'm sure there is something to be learned from that. You go in it assuming and hoping that everybody believes you play a 60-minute football game and you're capable of pushing through adversity, but some people need evidence. That is the reality of it. I think if we do have people that needed evidence, then that game provided that evidence for them and we move forward with a little more strength as a football team and that is great.

Do you learn from what other coaches do in situations?

I do. I am nine games into this thing. I learn everyday I come in here, in terms of putting my head coach's cap on. Everything that has happened thus far has been a learning experience for me. At the same time, the standard of expectation does not change for us. I understand that and I accept that, but we got to win. I am learning, but we have to win. That is what makes it fun.

Please evaluate Ike Taylor.

I think he is playing winning football for us. I have no problems with where he is playing. Is he capable of playing better? Absolutely. I think there are a lot of guys that are capable of playing better. Do we need more splash plays from him? Absolutely. The standards he has for himself are higher than any of those that can be imposed by anyone else. I know that because he and I have in-depth discussions often about that. This guy wants to be a great player. He is willing to do on a day-to-day basis what is required to from him to be a great player. In terms of what people say about him or feel about him, that is not our concern and that is not his concern. It is about pushing him towards greatness if that is what he desires and really, that is what we need from him.

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Did you talk to Anthony Smith about his penalty?

There is a fine line in this game. You can't get taunting penalties. That is a dumb penalty. Maybe we get off with a field goal right there, if we don't get that penalty. That is what I talked to Anthony about. At the same time, these guys are professionals and they understand that. There are a lot of tight ropes we walk in this business. We got to walk them.