



## Opening Statement:

Good afternoon. Before we get into the football, there are a few people I wanted to acknowledge. The 2020 season was a challenge in some unusual ways. We really had some outstanding efforts and leadership in the areas of combating COVID, starting first and foremost with our central COVID worker in John Norwig and his staff and the medical staff. They did an awesome job in terms of relaying league protocols and working to develop an environment that kept us as safe as we possibly could be in the circumstance. They're to be commended for that. I would also be remiss if I didn't express gratitude to our IT department under the leadership of Scott Phelps. There was some alternative teaching and learning approaches utilized in this environment and we really had to test ourselves in some of those areas. I just thought the support we had in that area was outstanding. We were able to give and receive information. We were able to adjust and to keep development going. They're to be credited for that. Outstanding, outstanding efforts.

In regards to the ball, still experiencing the disappointment associated with our last performance. It's just tough to swallow, it's tough to accept. Coming to grips with that, assessing what transpired. Going through or starting the process of going through the normal things you do unfortunately at this time of year, I start first and foremost saying obviously I didn't anticipate being here in this position. Disappointed by it. Understand that we better make some changes in terms of the things we do. We better look at every aspect of it. Schematics, personnel, approach to business. I am committed to that. I am also committed to not sitting in this position and feeling the way we feel right now moving forward. Those are just the general thoughts and feelings. Not a lot of work has transpired in terms of bringing some of those thoughts and feelings to fruition. You know our building was closed in the early portion of this week to protect the group from COVID. We had a virtual team meeting yesterday. We have just begun the exit interview process and it will continue throughout the remainder of the week and into next week. I think before you proceed, first you have to assess and evaluate and summarize the things that have transpired. We'll diligently push through those things and let those discussions and discoveries be our guide in terms of how we formulate our plan to move forward. I'll always acknowledge that change is a part of our business, particularly this time of year, particularly when you experience the type of ending that we have. I'll acknowledge that is a truth. I am not going to get into a lot of details. It's not time for that. We just have so many meetings and things to discover and talk about in the upcoming days and maybe even weeks. There's free agency to ready ourselves for, draft preparation, look at salary cap ramifications. We're just at the very infancy of that process in terms of meeting and talking about what that looks like. Gathering even information about what the pre-draft process looks like. What the Combine might look like, professional days, pro days and things of that nature. But more than anything just coming to grips with how our season ended and working to maybe learn from that as we move forward. I can't sit here and tell you that I am ready to do that at this juncture. But that's not abnormal. We put a lot into these journeys so there's a lot at stake so that is probably a reasonable feeling as I sit here today.

From a health standpoint of our team, we're still going through the exit physical procedures. A lot of these injuries that transpired in season, those surgeries have already transpired, and those people are in the rehab process, guys like Bud Dupree, and Devin Bush, [Zach] Gentry, Zach Banner and others. If there are surgeries on the horizon for us at the end of the season those things will be discussed and planned in the upcoming days and weeks. Our intentions are always to move as swiftly as we can in those circumstances in an effort to not adversely affect the preparation process for the 2021 season.

I am just so appreciative of all of the efforts of players and coaches and support people like I mentioned after the game on Sunday night. That feeling remains the same, but the sting is still there. And it's probably going to be a while. Like I said it's natural. Hopefully we utilize those feelings as positive fuel for us as we make the necessary changes to get better and improve our positioning and position ourselves to pursue a World Championship next season.

## Can you identify the reasons for the late season collapses the last three or four years? Is it fixable? (Gerry Dulac, Post-Gazette)

It is something that I am in the process of researching and working to identify and to make necessary changes to ensure that we are not having similar conversations as we move forward. It has been a disappointment. I will acknowledge that. I'm not going to maintain status quo and hope that the outcome changes. That's the definition of insanity.

## You have a lot of guys contemplating retirement, when would you want to know that they are returning? (Joe Rutter, Tribune-Review)

I don't know what the timeline is for those types of decisions, to be honest. Like I mentioned, I'm still very much assessing what transpired and just beginning the process of evaluating what transpired and information gathering in an effort to plot a course in terms of moving forward. Those roads usually converge in the upcoming weeks or so, and I imagine that they will. I don't know that I have any level of anticipation specifically as I sit here of when that might be.

## Did the 'bubble' that you have to deal with all year take a toll on the guys and did it just start to wear on them psychologically toward the end of the season? (Will Graves, Associated Press)

I'm sure there was a cumulative toll, but I'm sure that cumulative toll is shared by the entire National Football League. I don't know that has a significant bearing in terms of the trajectory of our season. We better look to other things in terms of the analysis of that. Those issues and problems you mentioned were universal and thus fair.

## You mentioned change, does that include changes on your coaching staff? Did anyone indicate this may be their last year with the team? Are you anticipating making any changes with your staff? (Dale Lolley, DK Pittsburgh Sports)

We haven't had any of those discussions. Change is a part of our business. I'll acknowledge the possibility for that. We are just beginning the process of having those types of meaty discussions that usually produce changes or non-changes. And so, it is that time of year. I anticipate those discussions happening and happening rather soon as we plot a course to move forward.

## How would you assess the performance of your offensive and defensive coordinators? (Jeff Hathhorn, 93.7 the Fan)

I'm not ready to individually assess anything at this juncture. There is a level of disappointment in all our performances collectively, starting with my own, as I sit here. And that is what I will be doing in the subsequent days and the upcoming days as I begin to meet and talk.

## As an organization, have you made a decision if you want Ben Roethlisberger back? Could you assess his play this year? (Mark Kaboly, The Athletic)

We haven't made any decisions about any of our personnel along those lines. As I mentioned, all of those discussions are interrelated, and we are just beginning to scratch the surface in terms of what 2021 looks like in terms of the make up of our team and the issues relative to it. In regards to Ben [Roethlisberger], I can't say enough about his performance this year. With the uncertainty coming off of injury, and particularly not having an opportunity to perform in preseason games and so forth, there really was a high level of concern about his health and his ability to perform. I can't say enough about his efforts. I can't say enough about the efforts of our medical staff and our rehabilitation staff that worked hand in hand with him to get him to that process and get him to stadiums this year. I was more than pleased with the performance of his health and his ability to stay up. In terms of the quality of his play and our play, we'll begin to assess that in the upcoming days, but in terms of him responding to the challenges that he specifically came into the season ready to face, spectacular.



## T.J. Watt and Cameron Heyward said the playoff game loss was a lack of execution. Was it that or a number of other things? (Mike Prisuta, WDVE)

It was a lot of things. We didn't perform well. When I say we, I mean us, players and coaches. I think specifically when a game started in the manner that it did and we spotted them the type of points that we spotted them, I think it was going to make splash plays and types of things that we like to do with our defensive unit more difficult. I think that the trajectory of our game changes when you are down the way that you are down. That probably had a lot to do with some of the challenges. More than anything, we didn't perform well enough, and that is just the truth of it.

## How do you start navigating an offseason with so many free agents when you don't know what the pre-draft process will look like? (Brooke Pryor, ESPN)

There's uncertainty in every season. You just comb through it page by page. And you start, first and foremost, with assessing your in-house things, the state of our team, the depth of our team, the issues relative to personnel with our team. And then we look at our looming potential free agents. I think that is the place we shop first and foremost. And then we look at the global map from that perspective. There's just so many meetings ahead of us, discussions that are ahead of us in regards to those things. The salary cap ramifications and the things we can do to get within compliance there. There's just a lot of work ahead. But that's not unusual. Maybe there are some unusual specific challenges, but just in general, it is challenging. The depths of it is challenging. So, there is a lot of work ahead.

## Do you think it is realistic that Ben Roethlisberger will be back given the cap implications? (Alby Oxenreiter, WPXI)

I don't have a clear assessment of the overall impact of the cap ramifications, so I might not have a direct answer to your question, but I think it is reasonable to assume that there is a chance that he will be back, certainly. The depths of the ramifications of the cap discussions, I am not privy to as I sit here right now.

## Is it possible to get back to the standard of making deep postseason runs with so much potential change or is this more of a one-year process in your mind? (Tim Benz, Tribune-Review)

It is our desire to be competitive, to compete for and pursue a world championship each and every year. As we begin this process to prepare for 2021, that will be our mindset, no doubt.

## What is it like with a veteran player or two or three that has contributed a lot to your team, and you have to have the conversation with them that you can't have them back? (Jim Colony, 93.7 the Fan)

I've experienced that some of the years and it's never easy, but it is the nature of our game and this business. It's something that you come to understand.

## Do you think the issues in the run game were related to personnel or scheme? (Ray Fittipaldo, Post-Gazette)

I think when you are dead last in anything, it is all the above. We better assess it as such. We will not accept our current position in that area. We cannot. We have to attack that and we will.

## The salary cap is projected to not increase, how do you feel like that has changed your outlook going into the offseason? (Alan Saunders, Pittsburgh Sports Now)

It definitely has and will present some unique challenges for us, but I would imagine it's going to present similar challenges for all of us across the global landscape. We will be given a fair opportunity to pivot and to deal with those ramifications.

## Do you feel like you had the physical personality you envisioned and what is the challenge when you are losing so many veterans that had that personality? (Aditi Kinkhabwala, NFL Network)

I think the personality is reflective of the makeup of the group. That is subject to change year in and year out. So, we will be working to establish what that's going to be in 2021 in an effort to have a consistent level of play, to be a consistent winner, to highlight our strengths and to minimize our weaknesses. That's what that is all about. In regards to were we able to attain that this year? I would have to say no. Just the overall trajectory of our group was not trending in the right direction over the second half of the season. Obviously, we weren't able to establish the things that we value in that regard in an effort to produce consistent wins and particularly consistent wins in the significant moments.

## Do you expect Kevin Colbert to be back next year? There are reports out there that he has been offered other jobs, do you know anything about that? (Chris Adamski, Tribune-Review)

I've worked with Kevin [Colbert] for 14 years. We have an awesome working relationship. We communicate each and every day multiple times a day. We've communicated today. I look forward to beginning this process with him. I know next to nothing about the rumors of things that you mentioned.

## How do you catch teams that have quarterbacks on their rookie deals when you don't have the same resources they might? (Will Graves, Associated Press)

That's been life for us for over a decade, the variables that you mentioned. Those guys are on rookie deals that teams are benefiting from that. I would imagine that they are in the process of earning deals and they will be in a similar circumstance that we are in and that's why they are still in the tournament. Those are things that are part of our business. I know when you have a quality quarterback and a guy that is capable of having you in that field, that's just the cost of doing business and I'm sure they're OK with doing that.

## With the NFL getting more aggressive with fourth down situations, has your philosophy changed in recent years in whether to go for those types of situations? (Tom Reed, DK Pittsburgh Sports)

I think my general attitude or receptiveness has been more liberal. Again, I make decisions based on what is transpiring in stadiums, the flow of the game, how are units are playing, etc.

## Are you still all in and are you as confident as you have ever been that you can achieve the success you have? (Mike Prisuta, WDVE)

Don't ask me about my confidence as I sit here today, man. I've just been kicked out of the single-elimination tournament. I probably can't give you a legitimate answer in terms of that. In terms of being all in? You bet.

## How do you get back to getting the physicality that the Steelers brand is built around? (Brooke Pryor, ESPN)

That's part of the investigation that I mentioned in my opening statement. We are not going to answer those questions in one sitting or succinctly in one sentence. We will investigate, we will plot a course, and then we will plan and walk that course at the appropriate time.

## How confident are you in Mason Rudolph moving forward? (Noah Strackbein, Sports Illustrated)

I thought he displayed that he took a step in growth and development in his performance, even though it was a small sample size. I would imagine that he is going to continue with that growth and development. We will see where that leads us in terms of what he is able to provide us. I'm excited that he was able to display that and I think it is reasonable for me to expect or him to expect that general trajectory to continue.

**Can you talk about the positive trajectory of some of the players that are under contract next season? (Bo Marchionte, College2Pro)**

I will say this, I was really pleased with the contributions and the level of maturity displayed by the draft class given the circumstances of how they came into the season. To get the type of contributions that we got from a Chase Claypool or a Kevin Dotson and the growth and development of some of the others over the course of the season, it is a tip of the cap to them and the people that worked alongside them, coaches—and not only the coaches, the other players and older players that mentored them. I was generally pleased with that and I'm excited about getting them in an offseason mentoring program that may be more normal and is reasonable to expect those types of contributions to continue to solidify and get better.

**Is this loss hard to expect because it was a loss or because of where you were at 11-0? (Gerry Dulac, Post-Gazette)**

It's all of the above. It is the loss, the nature of the loss, where we were, how we were trending. The fact that we are simply not playing this week. It's all something to deal with.

**Is there any player you know you want to lock in for the future this offseason? (Aditi Kinkhabwala, NFL Network)**

These guys know how I feel about them. That doesn't necessarily help get business done to make statements of that nature in this setting. I am appreciative of the efforts and the productivity and the capability of many of the men. I don't know that that is prudent at this time.

**Have you had a talk with Art Rooney II about your performance? (Mark Kaboly, The Athletic)**

We assess and meet continually and have since the end of the season and will continue. Those conversations and evaluations I'm sure will be intermingled in a lot of discussions as we proceed. I think that is normal business for us.

**Do you have any confidence to hold on to some of the younger free agents? (Jim Colony, 93.7 the Fan)**

I don't have a level of confidence that I can reference at this juncture, but just because I am gaining an understanding of the landscape in regards to the salary cap issues and how it could effect our decision making and prioritizing the things we need to get done. I'm very much in the information gathering stage there.

