

Will new Steelers coach embed himself like his predecessors?

BY GENE COLLIER

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PITTSBURGH — The Pittsburgh Steelers completed a little chore called hiring a new coach Saturday, something the Rooney's generally get around to when needed, roughly every 15 to 23 years.

Among all the statistics in every corner of the NFL datascape, all the next generation metrics and lost generation fossils of conventional football wisdom, perhaps nothing had sustained such prolonged inspection as the whole "Pittsburgh hiring only three head coaches since 1969" thing.

The Miami Dolphins have had three since the pandemic.

Rare as it is, a Steelers head coaching hire maintains a vague imagery in the deep memory, identifiable among the whipping snow and an ominous forecast.

Chuck Noll, hired Jan. 27, 1969; Bill Cowher, hired Jan. 21, 1992; and Mike Tomlin, hired Jan. 22, 2007. Two Hall of Famers and a Hall of Famer-in-waiting will soon have a successor, and there's a little pressure associated with that lin-

eage, don't you think?

Now Mike McCarthy is The Guy, but would you want to be that guy?

The historical irony is, to whatever precise degree McCarthy's new gig is thoroughly pressurized, most of it is going to be external. Art Rooney II was surprised to find Tomlin packing his career into a box on the morning of Jan. 13. Not living in his fears, the third generation scion of a pro football dynasty even revealed that he was willing to take another spin with Tomlin next fall despite his recent playoff pratfalls.

Tomlin and Cowher and Noll have been so imbedded in our sports consciousness for so long, even the people with the most direct stake in their performance can be reluctant to change the music.

On a spur of a moment visit this week to Christ Our Redeemer Catholic Cemetery, where Noll has rested in peace since 2014, it occurred to me not just that the Emperor would have been 94 this month, he might still be coaching were it up the Rooney's.

I have it on impeccable authority that Dan Rooney was shocked to learn of Noll's imminent resignation

in 1991. Noll wasn't fired. Cowher wasn't fired. Tomlin wasn't fired. The Rooney's haven't fired anyone since 1968, when the logo was a guy in overalls and a hardhat punting from steel beam.

When your logo is a punt, you've probably had a history of lowered expectations, which is the historical flip side of the Steelers' stability coin. When Dan graduated from Duquesne in 1955, he walked into a Steelers front office not exactly on track to eventually hire three coaches who'd work across most of six decades. The Steelers of Dan's childhood were averaging a new coach about every 30 months, in part due to the singularly North Side Irish rhythms of his father, Art Rooney Sr., part street fighter, part seat-of-the-pants sports entrepreneur.

The Chief, as he was known, made coaching changes in ways that would be considered well outside of best practices.

"Three coaches in our first three years in the league, and I had to knock two of them out," said the only actor in a stage play about him mounted years after he was gone.

"This was a management practice I eventually had to discontinue."

The last Steelers coach actually fired around here was Bill Austin, whom Dan dismissed after a 2-11-1 campaign in 1968. Austin was the third Steelers coach of the 1960's. You may have heard there've been three since.

So this week I found out that if you're in a state of mind that permits you to pull off 279 North and poke around a cemetery because of Chuck Noll, you're in a curious state of football vulnerability that's even weirder in a dream state.

So I had that dream where I was in some workplace, an office-type setting, and word came that coach Cowher wanted to see everyone in an upstairs office. There was a fast round of speculation on what Bill might need to impart of us underlings, accompanied by much grumbling about the unpleasantness of being chewed out by coach Cowher. But when we went up there to his office, there was no chewing out. He just said, "Yinz are all fired," and that was that.

You've never had that one?

How about the one where you're

sitting at a lunch counter, the only person at the counter while others are seated a nearby tables. Mike Tomlin comes out from the kitchen and hands you a piece of fish. No plate, no sandwich bun, just a slab of breaded cod, it looks like.

"No bun?" you say.

Tomlin just glares at you.

"How 'bout some Tabasco?"

He goes back to the kitchen.

Yeah, I had that one.

Mike Tomlin called me when my mother died. Not a dream. He came to see me open for Chris Porter during my overlong ill-fated standup career. Not a dream. He parked his Escalade on the sidewalk near the stage door and left without comment, like in the Tabasco moment.

Tomlin was aloof and prideful, but I liked him, and I liked Noll and Cowher, too, even as we were generally at cross purposes in that they were taking their job way more seriously than I was.

"No cheerleaders again this year?" I said to Noll one time in Latrobe.

"Would it help us win?" he said.

"Would it hurt?" I said.

He just glared at me.

point in the day," Oil City coach Eric Smith said. "It bodes well for the second half of our dual meet season.

"The kids have taken really good strides in the past two to three weeks," coach Eric Smith added. "We're really happy with how the team is coming along."

Spire

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On the boys side, Franklin placed fourth and Oil City sixth.

Jackson Clark tallied a win for the Knights in the 100 breast while

also placing third on the 400 relay with Jordan Stumpf, Parker Smith and Jacob Balsamo. Stumpf added a second in the 100 free and a third in the 50 free while Parker Smith took fourth in the 500 free and fifth in the 200 free and Clark took fifth in the 100 free.

Stumpf, Clark, Parker Smith and

Balsamo also teamed up to take fourth in the 200 medley relay.

Earning a victory for the Oilers was Johnathan Lander in the 100 free. Lander also took second in the 50 free and seventh in the 200 medley relay alongside Martin Sharrar, Tyler Schake and Noah Delp and a fourth in the 400 free relay with

Sharrar, Schake and Delp.

Nathan Wilson tallied a fourth-place finish in the 200 L.M., good enough to qualify for the district meet. He also qualified in the 500 free.

"We have a really young team, so we're really happy that everyone had a personal best at some

SUNDAY'S GAMES

Eastern Conference

GP W L OT Pts GF GA

NHL STANDINGS									
GP		W		L		OT	Pts	GF	GA
Tampa Bay	51	33	14	4	70	179	130		
Carolina	52	32	15	5	69	180	150		
Detroit	53	32	16	5	69	167	159		
Buffalo	51	29	17	5	63	172	155		
Pittsburgh	51	26	14	11	63	169	152		
Montreal	52	28	17	7	63	177	153		
Boston	53	30	20	3	63	177	166		
N.Y. Islanders	52	28	19	5	61	150	146		
Florida	51	28	20	3	59	157	165		
Philadelphia	51	24	18	9	57	154	162		
Toronto	52	24	19	9	57	170	176		
Washington	53	25	21	7	57	170	159		
New Jersey	52	27	23	2	56	138	159		
Columbus	51	24	20	7	55	169	169		
Ottawa	52	24	21	7	55	174	174		
N.Y. Rangers	53	22	25	6	50	143	165		

Western Conference

GP W L OT Pts GF GA

NHL STANDINGS									
GP		W		L		OT	Pts	GF	GA
Colorado	50	35	6	9	79	198	122		
Minnesota	53	29	14	10	68	171	154		
Dallas	52	29	14	9	67	172	144		
Vegas	51	25	14	12	62	171	161		
Edmonton	53	26	19	8	60	179	171		
Anaheim	52	28	21	3	59	173	181		
Utah	52	27	21	4	58	163	156		
San Jose	50	26	21	3	55	174	174		
Los Angeles	50	21	16	13	55	174	174		
Seattle	51	23	19	9	55	143	143		
Nashville	51	24	23	4	52	148	174		
Chicago	52	21	23	8	50	164	164		
Calgary	52	21	25	6	48	132	156		
Winnipeg	51	20	24	7	47	149	148		
St. Louis	52	19	24	9	47	172	179		
Vancouver	52	17	30	5	39	139	191		

Monday's Games

GP W L OT Pts GF GA

NHL STANDINGS									
GP		W		L		OT	Pts	GF	GA
Colorado	50	35	6	9	79	198	122		
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Los Angeles									