

## Steelers' Johnson rips referees for no-call on hit that injured Pickett

Dan Scifo

PITTSBURGH — Steelers wide receiver Diontae Johnson called for the referees to be fined following Pittsburgh's 20-10 loss to the Jacksonville Jaguars on Sunday, a defeat in which quarterback Kenny Pickett left with a rib injury following a big hit.

"They were calling some stupid stuff," Johnson said. "They should get fined for making terrible calls. That's how [mad] I am because they cost us the game. I don't care what nobody says, they cost us the game."

"[The referees] must've got paid good today or something," he added. "[The referees] wanted [Jacksonville] to win. Everything was in their favor. They were getting every little call. But it is what it is."

Johnson's displeasure centered around roughing the passer calls — one that was made against Pittsburgh and another he believes the officials missed, resulting in Pickett's injury.

In the first quarter, Pittsburgh's Keanu Neal was called for roughing the passer on Jacksonville's Trevor Lawrence during a series that ended with a Jags turnover.

Late in the first half, Pickett left with a rib injury after he was drilled by defensive end Adam Gotsis.

"Y'all are supposed to be protecting us," Johnson said. "That's our quarterback. He got slammed. He's not allowed to slam anybody. It's hard because you need your quarterback out there at the end of the day. We gotta roll with the next guy. That messes up the whole gameplan so now we gotta scramble to figure things out again."

The Steelers were also upset with an offsides call

at the end of the first half that wiped a field goal from the board.

Pittsburgh trailed 9-3 when Chris Boswell's 55-yard field goal was called back after an offsides penalty to right guard Isaac Seumalo — officials deemed he was in the neutral zone when the ball was snapped. Boswell missed a 61-yard attempt after the penalty.

"I hadn't seen that called in 17 years of standing on the sidelines," Tomlin said. "Aligned offsides on a guard, on a field goal protection. ... It didn't matter what they said. I have never seen that."

Seumalo, an eight-year veteran, agreed.

"I'm sure if you line up over the ball, it's offsides, but I never heard about it, or heard it called," Seumalo said. "I thought I lined up in the same spot I've been lining up for the past eight years."

Following the game, referee Alan Eck said that Seumalo was lined up in the neutral zone.

"His head was over the back edge of the ball, so by rule that's an offensive offsides foul," Eck said.

Mitch Trubisky threw for 139 yards in the second half, including a 22-yard touchdown to George Pickens late in the third quarter that brought the Steelers within 17-10. Trubisky, however, also threw two interceptions, including one in which he forced a pass into triple coverage early in the fourth quarter that was picked off by Andrew Wingard, giving momentum back to the Jaguars.

Johnson believed the field goal at the end of the half would've helped. Now, Johnson and the Steelers are forced to regroup before hosting Tennessee in a short week on Thursday.

The Associated Press



Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Kenny Pickett, center, is helped after getting shaken up against the Jacksonville Jaguars during the first half of an NFL football game Sunday in Pittsburgh. —AP PHOTO/MATT FREED



The national nonprofit Reach Out and Read has consistent growth from the tournaments, and aims to raise \$200,000 that goes directly toward children's literary needs. —TRIBUNE PHOTOS/CASSANDRA LOPEZ

## Annual basketball tournament promotes children's literacy

Cassandra Lopez  
TRIBUNE CORRESPONDENT

Germantown Friends School lent out their courts for the 10th Annual Reach Out and Read Basketball Tournament on Saturday, shooting hoops in effort to raise funds and provide pediatric patients at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children with books. The event ran from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with over 40 volunteers serving as referees, greeters and more to make it all happen.

Sixteen teams competed in a two-division, round-robin game consisting of 160 players from the Philadelphia region hungry for a win. Reach Out and Read, a national nonprofit, has seen consistent growth in donations through these tournaments, raising \$150,000 during last year's event. Their goal for Saturday was to reach \$200,000 that would go directly toward the literary needs of children within the St. Christopher's Hospital community in North Philadelphia.

Pamela Loos, associate director of Foundation and Corporate Relations, has been with St. Christopher's Hospital for about a year. She spoke of the purposeful placement of the hospital in North Philadelphia and the need sprawled before her as she goes to work everyday. Still, the hearts of the people who work alongside her shines bright with kindness and care as they pursue change and progress with St. Christopher's holistic approach to wellness.

According to Hans Kirsten, MD, St. Christopher's pediatrician and an organizer of the tournament, an alarming 46% of Philadelphia's children are unprepared to start kindergarten. This initiative proves to be pivotal in mitigating the language and literacy skill deficits and poverty cycles, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, both the hospital and nonprofit put heavy emphasis on the importance of parental involvement with reading and engaging with stories to help develop these necessary listening, reading and comprehension skills.

Judy McDowell, volunteer for



Teams warming up in Germantown Friends School's gym for their upcoming game.

Reach Out and Read and The Philly Book Bank at Martin Luther King High School, stood by a donation table covered in beautiful books as she greeted attendees with warmth and a deep rooted passion for the mission at hand.

"Families reading, reading to their children and understanding what reading can do — it's the most important thing they can do for their education and brain development," McDowell said. "It's not just about the reading, it's about the conversation that the books and stories engender."

Since the program's launch at the hospital, they have donated over 230,000 books to patients through the tournament fundraiser and provided literacy support for over 350,000 families.

The community rallied around

the games, cheering for their friends and teammates. Some attendees could be found perusing the tables of books while enjoying treats from a local cake shop called The Frosted Fox, located not far from the school on 6511 Germantown Ave. Others were taking group selfies at the photo booths provided by The Yellow Mirror.

"This has been really fun," Colin Brown, math teacher and volunteer basketball player, said about the event overall. "There is something about competing with people and shaking hands afterwards and saying that was a good game."

If interested in making a donation, you can visit [Drexel.edu/GiveToStChrisReachOutAndRead](http://Drexel.edu/GiveToStChrisReachOutAndRead). St. Christopher's Hospital for Children is a partnership of Tower Health and Drexel University.

## Harden sits out third straight game, Embiid gets the start for 76ers in home opener

Dan Gelston

James Harden was out for the 76ers. Joel Embiid was in, after the reigning NBA MVP skipped a chance to rest and started Sunday night in Philadelphia's home opener.

Harden's absence against Portland was no surprise — the 10-time All-Star has now missed all three games in the wake of his offseason trade demand. Officially, the Sixers say Harden needs to "ramp up" his conditioning before he can return to play. Harden has continued to practice with the Sixers and participated in

Sunday's film session and walkthrough.

Harden wore a yellow hoodie and jeans as he sat on the bench for opening night.

Harden did not travel with the Sixers on their opening-week road trip and was told to stay back and practice with the team's G League players.

"The report on him is, he had some good conditioning days," coach Nick Nurse said. "All signs are positive, conditioning-wise. Just need to get in some live action."

Nurse said he expected Harden to practice on Tuesday. The 76ers don't play again until Thursday.

The 76ers only introduced their starting lineup on Sunday so Harden wasn't included, but he did make the cut in the pregame hype video.

Embiid dropped 24 points in an opening-night loss at Milwaukee and scored 34 points in a win Saturday night against Toronto. With three games in four days, and the opener coming on the back end of a back-to-back, Embiid almost sat out, a startlingly inconceivable notion for the first home game of the season.

But the NBA this season strengthened its rules about resting healthy players. The league is already investi-

gating the reasons behind Harden's absence from the 76ers' nationally televised season opener.

The policy prevents teams, without approval, from resting multiple star players (defined as anyone who was an All-NBA or All-Star selection in the prior three seasons) in the same game, or sitting healthy ones in nationally televised or in-season tournament games.

Nurse said the load management policy complicates the decision "a little bit" to play or rest a player like Embiid.

The Associated Press



Philadelphia 76ers' James Harden, third from right, looks on from the bench with his teammates during the first half of an NBA basketball game against the Portland Trail Blazers, Sunday in Philadelphia. —AP PHOTO/CHRIS SZAGOLA