



Pittsburgh Steelers newly-signed quarterback Russell Wilson speaks with reporters during an NFL football news conference in Pittsburgh on March 15. Wilson signed a one-year deal with the Steelers after he was cut by the Denver Broncos. (AP Photo/Rebecca Droke)

Wilson for the Steelers

Russell Wilson is eager to reboot his career in Pittsburgh. The Steelers are betting big on it

By **WILL GRAVES**

Associated Press

Russell Wilson didn't come out Friday and say he expects to be the starting quarterback in Pittsburgh.

Considering the lengths the Steelers went to woo the nine-time Pro Bowler and Super Bowl champion — including the stunning decision to move on from the player Wilson was supposed to compete against — he didn't have to.

Well before Pittsburgh agreed to trade Kenny Pickett to Philadelphia just hours after Wilson was introduced, the team had laid the groundwork to make sure Wilson would be behind center for the 2024 opener.

Longtime Steelers defensive captain Cam Heyward reached out to Wilson earlier this month after the Denver Broncos told

Wilson they were cutting him before the new league year began.

The next day, what was supposed to be a 15-20 minute video conference with Pittsburgh head coach Mike Tomlin stretched to an hour and a half, with star safety Minkah Fitzpatrick interrupting to playfully jaw back and forth with a rival turned potential teammate.

Then All-Pro outside linebacker T.J. Watt chimed in, outlining his goal to be the best in the world at what he does every day he comes to work.

All capped by an extended meeting last Friday in which Wilson walked by the six Lombardi Trophies that greet visitors to the Steelers' offices and before taking a tour of a city that, as Wilson put hours after signing a one-year deal with the club "has won a lot."

Only not enough of late, the primary

reason the Steelers felt compelled to bring in Wilson, believing there's more than enough football left in the 35-year-old to help Pittsburgh end a playoff victory drought that's at seven years and counting.

Wearing a black blazer and black T-shirt highlighted by a gold chain, Wilson used the word "win" 18 times over the course of 20 minutes, with Tomlin and general manager Omar Khan occasionally nodding approval while standing just a few feet away.

Asked if he has arrived in Pittsburgh with a chip on his shoulder following two mostly bumpy years in Denver — a stretch in which Wilson went 11-19 as a starter and clashed last season with head coach Sean Payton — Wilson nodded and said "one-hundred percent."

"I think that every day you wake up there's something to prove," Wilson said.

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“You know, you want to be the best version of you. You’ve got a certain edge and this place does too.”

So much so that just two weeks after insisting he had “full faith” in Pickett — who went 14-10 as a starter but struggled to stay healthy and be a consistent difference maker — Khan sent the guy tabbed as the quarterback of the future after being taken 20th overall in the 2022 draft to the Eagles.

The decision completed a dizzying stretch in which the Steelers completely revamped their quarterback room, cutting Mitch Trubisky in a salary cap move while Mason Rudolph, who sparked a late surge that helped Pittsburgh reach the playoffs, signed as a free agent with Tennessee.

Enter Wilson, eager to show he’s far from done as year 13 beckons. He admitted he wasn’t at his best during his first year in Denver while dealing with a lat injury that he tried to grit his way through. Wilson said “felt like myself again” in 2023 while throwing for 3,070 yards and 26 touchdowns, though it wasn’t enough for him to win over Payton, who benched Wilson in late December.

Wilson declined to get into specifics about what went wrong with the Broncos,



Denver Broncos quarterback Russell Wilson throws during the first half of an NFL football game against the Detroit Lions, on Dec. 16. The Broncos told Wilson on March 4 that they were going to release him. (AP Photo / Duane Burleson)

who acquired him in March 2022 for an avalanche of draft picks and then signed him to a massive new contract with the hope he could help Denver close the gap on Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs.

It never happened. Now Wilson finds himself eyeing a fresh start in Pittsburgh, which will pay him just \$1.2 million in 2024 while the Broncos pick up the tab for the

\$39 million they still owe him.

It’s a low-risk/high-reward equation for the Steelers, who are confident an uptick in production at the most important position on the field could go a long way for a team that has reached the playoffs in three of the last four years despite an offense that been tethered to the bottom third of the league.

While stressing he’s “never been a numbers guy,” Wilson did add that “touchdowns matter.”

“I’m used to being in the end zone,” said Wilson, who threw for 26 scores in 15 games in 2023. “We’ve got to make it a priority to get in there as much as we can.”

That figures to change significantly when training camp opens at Saint Vincent College in July. The Steelers have a lengthy track record of finding and developing talented receivers. What they’ve lacked since Ben Roethlisberger’s prime in the mid-2010s is a difference-maker who can stretch the field.

Wilson believes he can help solve that problem. So does linebacker Patrick Queen, who signed a three-year, \$41-million deal to join Wilson in Pittsburgh.

“If Russ plays like Russ,” Queen said, “this team is scary.”

The Steelers — in very un-Steeler-like fashion — are betting big on it.

Chicago Bears trade Justin Fields to Steelers

By ANDREW SEGILMAN

Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — The Chicago Bears traded Justin Fields to the Pittsburgh Steelers on Saturday night, clearing the way for them to draft a quarterback with the No. 1 overall pick.

“We have engaged in multiple trade conversations in recent weeks and believe trading Justin at this time to Pittsburgh is what is best for both Justin and the Bears,” general manager Ryan Poles said in a statement. “Today we spoke to Justin to inform him of the trade and the rationale behind it for us as a club.

“We want to thank him for his tireless dedication, leadership and all he poured into our franchise and community the last three years and wish him the best towards a long and successful NFL career.”

Fields thanked Chicago and the organization, as well as his teammates in a post on X.

“Can’t say thank you enough to the city of Chicago for taking me in and embracing



Chicago Bears quarterback Justin Fields passes against the Pittsburgh Steelers during the NFL football game on Nov. 8, 2021. The Bears traded Fields to the Steelers on March 16. (AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar)

me,” he tweeted. “Thank you to the entire Bears organization and ownership for allowing me the opportunity to be part of such a historic franchise. But most of all thank you to my all my brothers that I played with. You all were the reason I attacked each day the way I did. I can’t thank you all enough for what y’all have

meant to me over the last 3 years through the ups and downs. I wish each one of you nothing but success.

“Ready for this next chapter!”

Fields figures to back up nine-time Pro Bowler Russell Wilson, who signed a one-year deal with the Steelers on Friday. Pittsburgh also traded Kenny Pickett to the Philadelphia Eagles once it added Wilson.

Wilson tweeted a picture of him and Fields shaking hands with the message: “Let’s get it @justinfields! QB room bout to be (fire).”

Fields completed 578 of 958 passes for 6,674 yards with 40 touchdowns and 30 interceptions in three seasons. He has just one 300-yard passing game in his career.

Associated Press Writer Rob Mad-di in Tampa, Florida, and Associated Press writer Will Graves in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, contributed to this report.