

Rutgers University Football Media Conference

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Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

Greg Schiano

Postgame Press Conference



Illinois - 23, Rutgers - 20

GREG SCHIANO: Okay, guys, it's a tough one. That's for sure. A lot of things went into it, but ended up on the wrong end of the stick. So try to help you wherever I can and get back to work.

Q. What was the thought process first and 10 from the Illinois 37 after Isaiah's run? You throw the ball there. What was the thought process in that situation?

GREG SCHIANO: Quite honestly, calling plays, the guys who call the plays, they're in a flow and the guy was open. We just didn't make the throw. We missed the throw. If we complete that throw, right, and you say, Oh, that's the way to be aggressive and now you're milking the clock down and they have one timeout and we kick the field goal to win it with no time on the clock. In retrospect, yeah, I wish we hadn't thrown it because we threw an interception, but the reality is the route was there and we've got to be able to throw the route and complete the play. And that's what you do when you call plays, you ham-and-egg it, you mix back and forth because we're still at the 37-yard line or 36, whatever it is. That's not in our range yet consistently. Can we hit it there? Sure. But we're trying to move the ball down. And in retrospect, sure when you throw the pick, you wish you hadn't thrown it. But again, there have been many times when you complete that ball and you wind the clock down and kick it with four seconds and everybody jumps on the kicker, so it didn't work out this time.

Q. Can you talk about the play of Noah? And was there a point where you thought about maybe pulling him for Art?

GREG SCHIANO: I thought it was a little bit of ups and downs, a little inconsistent. But we made some big throws too and that's the hard thing. We're making some plays and then we're giving some up. That's kind of, if you sum it up, that's the story of the game. We just did not play consistently well enough to win that game. And when you make mistakes like we did in the Big Ten conference and

some of them are, granted are by Illinois, right? No. 1 was very hard to get down, very good elusive player. We had our opportunities, for sure. We had people at the spot. He made some guys miss. He's a good player. They're doing that because their quarterback's not available. It's tough. But we made mistakes. We had some penalties that just aren't what we allow in our program and those, one of them on a, one of them, that drive led to a score. The other one didn't. We took the ball away. But still, those catch up to you when they catch up to you. You can't do that stuff. That's, I call those stupid and selfish penalties. You do that stuff, it makes you feel better in the moment and it hurts your team. And that's not what we're about. So we got to get all that stuff fixed and that's part of building this thing, building this program. We have to, have to, have to understand what it takes to win in this league and if we don't, it will be that roller coaster, some good, some bad. We need to learn that it's all in, it's everything, otherwise this is, this league's too hard to win in.

Q. You mentioned Isaiah and how tough it is to bring him down, but what are you seeing right now from the run defense overall?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, it's a different, this is a different kind of run defense. Our run defense has actually been pretty decent up until this. This is option football with a very elusive option quarterback, and he did a great job. He really was electric. Kind of contained him in the first half, semi. But you know what happens with a guy with that ability. It doesn't take much. There's a little drop off if you're a little fatigued, if you're a little bit banged up, and, you know, that's the way it is and that's college football. Guys are going to have players like that that they jump in there -- we do it a little differently with Johnny Langan, but he's very productive for us. So today it was full time and we kind of had a suspicion that that's what we were going to get. But you never know for sure. But he is an elusive guy.

Q. You talked about you're trying to get closer for the field goal. What is going on with the kicking situation? You had Fava early on, now Valentino, Justin's back on kickoffs, not handling place kicks. Where do you stand and why did you go with Valentino today?



GREG SCHIANO: I just felt like he's been kicking better and it's been leading up that way. And again, those competitions are open competitions and you see what you see on Saturday, but I see them every day at practice and we evaluate them and it's the same with every position. I think every position is open and we have moved some linebacker, we moved some offensive linemen. This is the very early stages of a program and every single day it's going to be earned and we'll make changes. I've said that to the guys. We don't, I've often said to the guys, I don't make the changes. I just facilitate it on the depth chart. Your performance is what moves you up and down relative to the people that are at your position. Valentino had shown that he had really improved and so we felt it was the best thing for the team, gave us the best chance to win with him kicking.

Q. You mentioned a couple of the big plays you guys had on offense. I guess the two most notable ones came from Bo Melton. Can you talk a little bit about his game and his performance today?

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah, I mean, I thought Bo again showed up, made plays, did his job. He has become a consistent performer for us in the first four games, so we need to keep that going and we need to add some guys with him. We need more guys with him and we need to throw and catch better. I thought Pop ran the ball hard today. There's some things out there that we can, that we still left on the table. But again, we'll get better, go back to work. It's a hard one. There's a lot of hurting kids down, and coaches, and you feel like one got away. But I tell you, I've been in the other locker room and Illinois doesn't feel like it got away. They feel like they earned a win. And that's what competitive sports are about, competitive college football is about. You got to reload and get ready to go next week.

Q. What will you say to Noah this week to keep his confidence up or address any confidence concerns?

GREG SCHIANO: Oh, there's nothing you can say. There's no magicians out there. Confidence is earned. So confidence to me is earned through preparation and then through performance. So when you don't perform the way you want to, then you got to go back and hit the preparation harder. I'm not saying he didn't prepare hard because I'm sure he did. I believe he did. He made some that were the plays that really gave us the lead and then we didn't make some others and that's reality. I don't think that coaches have this wand they can give people confidence with. I point out what he did well. But you got to learn, this one, you can't do that, can't throw it late there, that's dangerous. To me playing quarterback is about managing risk and managing opportunity. We talk about it

all the time. You got to let bad plays die. There's plenty of them. I don't know how many we played today, but there's plenty of plays. Let the bad ones go. It's hard, though, right? Because every one of these kids is an intense competitor and they're trying to make it work on that play. That's hard. At every level it's always been a challenge to get the quarterbacks to do that and the great ones know they can sense when it's time to manage the risk and when it's time to go for the jugular and take advantage of the opportunity.

Q. I know this season a bunch of guys have started and played at center. I was curious what Felter did to earn the start today.

GREG SCHIANO: Well, Felter started at guard, but we just felt like, again, no different than the kicker, when we evaluated the combination of practice and what's happened in games, we felt like he gave us the best chance to win. It's hard to tell with a lineman, to see it all now. I'm anxious to see the tape and evaluate how we played up front. But usually when you run for the yards that we did, somebody blocked somebody, so I'm looking forward to looking for it, looking at it.

Q. I think the first few weeks of the season raised the expectations for people outside of the program. Is a game like this a reminder that the trajectory for a rebuild is really not straight up?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, I guess yes and no. I want the expectations to be higher. That's what they should be. But I knew what this game was going to be. I told our team early on and I told them throughout the week, this is a team that went to a bowl game last year. They lost a lot of guys to COVID. They're 0-3. Coach Smith is a great coach. He's got a great staff. This is a wounded animal backed into a corner and they're going to come out and fight. When you've been doing this as long as I have, you know this one's coming down to the final whistle. You know it. And essentially it did, right, whatever it was kicked with, seven seconds, whatever it was.

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