

# Rutgers University Football Media Conference

Monday, November 20, 2023

Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

## Greg Schiano

### Press Conference

GREG SCHIANO: Thanksgiving week, appropriate. I'm really thankful for the scene I don't see that will be playing their last game at SHI Stadium. These are the seniors that really have laid the foundation of our program here this second go-around.

You know, guys like Mayan Ahanotu who came here as a transfer and really didn't know where he was in his career and became, really, the leader of our team, the elder statesman, the guy who is a mature guy.

Deion Jennings, right, who had an up and down career with injuries but now the last two years has been just a phenomenal player for us.

You know, go down the list, Reggie Sutton, a guy that no one thought would or should or could ever play again, and look what he's done.

So you go down, Isaiah Washington, right, Isaiah had plenty of chances where he could have said, this new coach, what am I doing, a kid from Jacksonville, Florida and stuck it out. And what a great example for young players that have struggled a little bit and to see what he's been able to do.

There's so many guys, Johnny Langan has done just about everything. One of the officials said to me when Johnny went down Saturday, said, "Is he okay?" Said, I don't know. Man, feels like he's been playing here forever.

Those are the kind of guys that twenty years from now when they come back and Rutgers is winning Big Ten Championships and playing in college football playoffs and winning national championships, they are going to know they are the ones who laid the foundation for this program.

So I'm very thankful for them. I'm sure I missed people. Kess Abraham, a guy if you remember was defensive Player of the Year in 2021 and then some injuries have sidetracked him but my goodness, his attitude is incredible still to this day, is the energizer on our team.



Again I'll forget people and I hate to single out but I sit here again and I'm grateful and thankful for the guys. And now we have a challenge. We want to send these guys out with a win in their last game in their home stadium against a very good Maryland team.

When you look at them, really talented. Offensively, they have got pros on the offensive line, at receiver, at tight end and they certainly have a pro quarterback. He is as dangerous as any quarterback in America, and defensively, they are really athletic. They have got nine takeaways. When you look at a team that has a bunch of takeaways, they get after the passer, they run to the ball. Their two safeties are as good as there is in America and they are a good football team. They hit a stretch in the middle of the year, don't really know. But they played really well Saturday and had every opportunity to knock off Michigan.

So we know what we're in for and it's going to be a battle. We both find ourselves in a similar position at 6-5, and a lot of respect for what they do, and looking forward to playing the game, so I'll try to help you in any way I can.

**Q. After playing three of the best defenses in the country the last three games, will this be more of an indication of where your offense is playing against Maryland?**

GREG SCHIANO: Unfortunately Maryland is really good on defense. I think they are somewhere, they are in the top 40 defense in the country. I was kind of hoping when I throw the tape on that I was going to see a defense that was so-so and we could get back on track. But these guys are really good. But that's life in the Big Ten.

Our guys are beat up. I'm sure they are beat up. It's the end of the season. I'm not sure at some positions who is going to be play, to be quite frank with you, I'm not going to get into who, competitive advantage.

But it caught up with a us Saturday from a physical standpoint. We are going to have to really muster it up to be able to play the level of football you're going to need to play to win a game against a team like Maryland.



**Q. When you got here, in what ways did you look to them to help establish your culture and guide the younger players through that transition and get to where you are right now?**

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah, it's a great question. I made it real clear when I came back, the first probably five or six months, it was a crazy year, right. We never had spring practice. We never had training camp. The season gets canceled. You can't make it up, right. Just insane if you think back to it.

We tried to do our best in a crazy time, and at what cost. You know, they were the only people on campus. They were driving down the street in the dorms. You couldn't even drive them. They had to walk in separated by six feet. If you think back, it seems insane now but that's what was the recommendations at the time.

And all these kids did was trust in us and I'm grateful for that. You know, some didn't stick around, and I understood that. I never -- you know, the first five or six months, I never said, hey, if you don't like it, get the heck out. I tried to prove to them who we were, and I'll never forget, we sat down by the statue, by the scarlet walk, and it was right before, I guess it was like the beginning of camp, we were told, don't do too much because the season is probably going to get canceled.

So we wasn't out for find of a run-through with no pads on. I said, this is stupid, come on over here. We sat down, said, look, I don't know what's going to happen but we've tried to prove to you that we are here to develop you, we are here to help you and we are here to build a program but you've got to make a decision now, you either have to do it our way or you have to leave. That was the first time I said that after six months.

And the guys who stayed, they have done an incredible job. Has it been all linear? No. But they believed. They kept trusting in us. And I'm grateful for that. Like I said, they will be the ones when you look back that laid the foundation for what we're building and are going to eventually have built here. So yeah, I'm grateful to them.

**Q. What did Taulia Tagovailoa do so well and what makes him a difficult guy to defend and that offense difficult to defend?**

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah, he does just about everything you would ask a quarterback to do. He throws from pocket well. He throws the quick game well. He throws the deep ball well. Then when things break down, he creates well. He also, you can tell, runs the offense with precision and ease. He looks very, very comfortable doing it. He's been

doing it for a lot of years. He was with Locksley down in 'Bama and he came there. He's been in this system for a long time and you can tell.

He's a very dangerous quarterback.

**Q. You talk about the first year, do you ever look back and game where things are with the program now compared to when you first got back in December about four years ago?**

GREG SCHIANO: Do I ever gauge? Not in the midst of what we're doing now. But at different times, the beginning and the end of -- I break the year into parts. So post postgame to spring practice, and then spring practice to summer training and then summer training to training camp and training camp and then the season.

So I always look back at those times, before and after. One, to see what we did and make sure that we are planning correctly with all the notes and the accurate after-action reports that we did to make sure we don't repeat the same errors and ideas that we had coming off, and then afterward, look at, so I can write notes that are fresh in my mind, this is what we did well, this is what we need to improve on, because if you think you're going to remember all the details when it comes time next year, you're kidding yourself, at least I'm not going to do.

But a lot of things happen every year. So that's when I do it. So I don't try to do it in the midst of it because the reality is, as I've said to you guys so many times, it's really hard to do what we're trying to do, and any distraction could really be the difference. So I try not to allow that to happen.

**Q. What's your trust level with Gavin heading into the Maryland game?**

GREG SCHIANO: Very high. I felt Gavin played his best game as a Rutgers player on Saturday. Just you know, we played against the No. 2-ranked defense in America. They lead the in addition in sacks. Gavin stood in there, delivered the ball well.

The thing that glares is the three turnovers.

Well, the one, as I said, the guy beat him to the back of his drop, so I'm not sure what he's supposed to do there. The second one was on a mesh and I'm not going to get into the particulars on that. And then the interception is a tough one. They kind of got us and they did a good job. Could we have avoided it? Sure. But they are on scholarship, too. They are a good team. But from an execution standpoint, Gavin played his best game as a Rutgers player against Penn State.

Now what I'm hopeful for is now we go do it again and take a little step in the Maryland game, because if he does that, we're going to be in a good place.

**Q. Goal every week is to go 1-0. What would it mean to go 1-0 this week also meant you set the Big Ten program record for most wins in the season?**

GREG SCHIANO: You're right, 1-0, whatever that leads to, but nobody is naïve to what it leads to. It leads to a winning record. It leads to winning the most Big Ten games in Rutgers -- I told these guys, you have a chance.

It's not National Championship history but right now it's history for Rutgers, and it's part of the climb, right. It's part of what we're doing. And they are aware of it, yeah, so I think it would be great.

But the reality is, that's something nice to think about for a second, and then you've got to fix your sights on the job that you have to do and the preparation you have to do because without that, there's no chance of the result being what you want. So that's kind of how we do it.

**Q. Last year you went into the season at Maryland, probably the roughest game you had last year. Is that something that gets brought up with the team and you talk about and add to some of that juice?**

GREG SCHIANO: No. That feels like, literally, ten years ago. Things were so different then. At that point, I mean, you could tell after that game, I was just -- I need to get away a little bit. But that was a long culmination of a lot of things that happened.

I feel so different right now going into this game. I'm encouraged, excited more than I've ever been about our team.

Yes, it's been three tough weeks but it is my job to look at the development, and not the big picture every day but the development, are we developing because at the end of the day, that's my job. I know if we keep getting better, eventually that's going to be good enough. But if you don't, right, one day going in the wrong direction that takes a lot of work just to get back to where you were and I can't allow that. So that's why if you're out of practice, whatever you say, the standard is the standard. We're just never going to lower the standard.

Will we reach it every day? Maybe not. But it's always going to be there, and it's only going to get higher as we get better.

**Q. You talked a moment ago about Gavin and how you felt like he had his best game as a Rutgers quarterback. What have you seen from him leading up over the course of the season to put him in that kind of a position to have that kind of performance throwing the football?**

GREG SCHIANO: I think he's really beginning to understand the preparation necessary and he's always been a guy that prepares, but to play quarterback at this level, I don't think anybody understands unless they have done it or they have coached it. It's really, really detailed and there's so many things you have to make split-second decisions on. You know, most people can't do it on a video game, forget do it live when you might get smashed in the back of the head.

So I think it's underestimated. I've said it so many times, and I think people just, oh, he's saying that to protect the quarterbacks. To me, it's the most difficult thing to do in sport, and some would argue, if you have to pitch a whole game -- yeah, but no one is trying to hit you in the back of the head when you're pitching. You have to do all this stuff and over guy in the other-colored jersey is trying to keep you from doing it. Some of them by hitting you, some of them by covering the guys you're throwing to, some of them by trying to trick you.

So I think playing quarterback is a tremendous responsibility, a tremendously huge job and I think Gavin is getting better at it every week.

**Q. Not looking too far ahead, but fans are starting to look at Bowl projections and what could be. Do you look at any of that stuff or do you have any role as far as talking to reps? Are you lobbying for any certain Bowls? Can you give us your Thanksgiving plate?**

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah, Thanksgiving plate and Bowl projections. I don't really look at that very much. The thing, as you guys know, I get excited about Bowl games because we get more practice. You know, one of the things that allows winning teams to continue to be winning teams is additional practice opportunity, so that's what excites me the most. I want the kid to always have a great time in the Bowl and we'll talk more about that next week. But yeah, that's about the extent that I think about it. There's other people that work for us that handle that stuff and they do a good job.

Thanksgiving plate, kind of traditionalist. But when you're Italian, you throw in just a little bit of pasta in there but otherwise it's pretty traditional.

**Q. Where did the offensive line take the biggest steps**



**over the course of the season?**

GREG SCHIANO: I think in technically understanding what they are supposed to do. During the season, you're not really making tremendous strength gains. We try to make minimal strength games. Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. But really it's about technical technique and then understanding what defenses are doing, and the more you face different defenses, I think they build a library of things that they can then go back to, hey, this is like what Iowa did or this is what Indiana did. I think that's critical for o-lines. You know what kind of has solidified the five that have played together the back half of the year, you know, that helps a little bit, too.

We have certain guys that will sub for now and again, but yeah, we are making progress. Again, not as fast as we'd like. That's at every position, but well, we're encouraged. We are. We've just got to keep pounding, keep chopping at it.

Our band, our band is playing in the Macy's Day Parade which is really cool, so to them, I want to wish them luck for a great performance and to you guy, some of you I will see before, but if I don't, have a great thanks giving, and definitely see you on Saturday. Thanks.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports ...