

Rutgers University Football

Media Conference

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Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

Greg Schiano

Press Conference

GREG SCHIANO: Okay, guys, appreciate you coming out. It's on to Week 2, the Akron season. Got a chance to watch a lot of college football this weekend, and obviously watched that Ohio State game.

I thought Akron played really well. Defensively they present some issues. Their scheme is one that is a little bit different. It reminds me a little bit of when Jim Leonhard was at Wisconsin, that kind of scheme. I know there's some connection there with the coordinator.

Player-wise, they are stout up front. Defensively inside they are big. They are 300-plus pounds and then 19, the Nunnally kid, I think is active off the edge. No. 40, I think McCoy is his name, the linebacker, he's a good player. Very active.

In the secondary, I think their DBs are pretty good. The safety, I think it's No. 9, Lewis, he's an active player, long, good-looking kid. Then Golden-Nelson No. 3, I thought he showed up. The kid who I think is kind of a ball hawk is 24, the nickel back, I believe his name is Lewis.

So they have, what I thought, very active defense. They gave Ohio State, you look at the score and say, well, they didn't give them a lot. They gave them some problems up front what they were doing defensively. So we are going to have to really work hard to be able to move the ball.

When you look at the offense, their quarterback, Finley, No. 10, I thought he was doing some good things, and then he got injured. So I don't know what the status will be.

Someone that we are very familiar with, Tajh Bullock, a New Jersey kid, was playing in a two-quarterback system and then when he got hurt, Tajh became the sole quarterback. I thought he did a good job. He's a very athletic guy that presents problems both running and throwing. So we are going to have our hands full there.

I thought their tight end, 88, I can't remember his name, Newell, maybe, I thought he has -- he's a big kid and does some good things. And then No. 4, I forget his name,



Golden, maybe, you could see his speed. He's their speed guy at the receiver position.

Then the offensive line is big. 300-pounds plus across the board. Now the center might not be -- depending who plays, but the guards and the tackles are big. So you know, Joe Moorhead is an accomplished coach. Joe, we've competed with Joe when he was at Connecticut and -- or Penn State when I was at Ohio State. He's an excellent coach. His teams are always well-coached. They always have some wrinkles that you're not ready for.

So I said, all right, offensively you know Joe is always going to have them prepared. So that's what we're up against, and we've got to take care of our business.

Opening game, we learned a lot about our team. We are learning a lot about our team and that's what early season is about. You figure out where you're good enough, where you're not, try to make some adjustments.

I thought our guys, as I mentioned Thursday night, they chopped through the game. It wasn't smooth. They just kept chopping through it and ultimately succeeded. Now we are headed on to the Akron season and everything we got will be poured into this season and see where it leaves us.

I mentioned it late in the press conference on Thursday, but I thought our student section was awesome. I thought it was a force. I think that, quite frankly, they had a lot of fun but now they have set the standard and just like I always say around here, the standard is the standard. Well, the student section set the standard. We need them and I'm looking forward to seeing them again Saturday.

I really think our whole crowd are starting to find their collective voice, and this could get interesting. If we can do our part, I think our fans are going to do their part. So excited about that. So with that, open it up for questions.

Q. Kaj Zanders what he show in spring and training camp that allowed him to continue to improve and earn that starting spot the other day?

GREG SCHIANO: Kaj is a very gifted athlete, right, when



you watch him play in high school, and even now. He could be playing on the offensive side of the ball. He's that kind of athlete. We think that safety is his best position but he's fast. He's athletic. He's got instincts, and he's just got to learn.

You know, the only thing he lacks is experience. So he'll keep getting that, and hopefully continue to get better and better.

Q. You mentioned Tajh Bullock, being familiar with him, his story as a New Jersey guy. What did you learn about him and did you personally recruit him as a high school prospect?

GREG SCHIANO: We did, yeah. We were involved in the recruitment. He ended up going to Virginia Tech. But yeah, Saint Peter's Prep kid. I have a lot of respect for him. He's a tough, hard worker, yeah. I got to see his dad. His dad was at the 7-on-7 this summer, and we were talking a little bit. But I always had a lot of respect for Tajh; the way he carries himself and the way he approaches the game.

Again, I don't know who is going to be the quarterback or who is going to play what but we'll be ready for both.

Q. What specifically is something that Rutgers can improve on against Akron?

GREG SCHIANO: That list is a long, long list. We have a laundry list of things we have to improve on. Special teams-wise, we had new people kicking off, new person long snapping, new person punting.

So we had some glitches there we have to improve on. We had a new person returning, a true freshman in Ben Black. And as you go back and look at it, Ben had an opportunity there that we just didn't quite see it correctly but he will eventually. And when he does, he'll be a force.

So we have a lot of things special teams-wise we've got to work on. We missed two real opportunities in the punt block game which we can't afford to do, right, that we spent time on it. We've got to cash on it.

Offensively, you know, I think we learned more about our offensive line. We learned more about our receiving core. Obviously we have a new quarterback, so we learned more about what it's like to go into -- under pressure with him. We've been in practice and things but it's always different during the game.

Then defensively, I think we learned about some young linebackers. We learned about a young safety, to Chris's

point, and then we learned about our young linebackers. With both our starters down, Djabome stepped in, as well as Moses Walker and some others, Timmy Hinspeter stepped in there. Abram Wright stepped in there. So it was good to see that.

Up front, you know, you've got a chance to see some young guys jump in there and play a little bit. So we learned a lot. We know we have a lot to work on. We were out there last night practicing, which one of the benefits of a Thursday game.

Now, the players are off today. Today is a big day because tomorrow they start school. That's when things get really interesting for the whole month of August, really, end of July, month of August, it's just been football. And now here comes -- at Rutgers, as I say to you guys all the time, it's quite a challenge, a challenging school, one of the top schools in America and our guys have to compete.

And I'm really proud of the way they have competed after summer school. Again, we continue to set new highs. We have the highest team GPA cumulative in the history of Rutgers football and that's something that I'm very proud of, and we've just got to keep going.

As we start classes now tomorrow, it's a whole new semester. It's just like football, right. You're only as good as your last play, or your last class, and we have to make sure our guys understand that.

Q. You had 14 pressures against Howard, one sack. Are you concerned with the sack numbers or is it a matter of continuing that level of pressure?

GREG SCHIANO: Certainly concerned. That quarterback is as mobile as any quarterback we'll see in the Big Ten. I mean, he was -- he could really move. A couple times he got into space with our guys and we couldn't catch him. He's a very talented young man, but we are going to see another one this week, right.

It seems to be the way college football is headed, and you better have a good plan and you've got to get him on the ground and hopefully get him on the ground ask get the ball out. We have to get better in that area.

Overall, defensive front, we played solid, but we didn't play up to our expectation, and we will.

Q. I know it's only one game, but I guess what's your assessment so far of the way the O-line performed? And now that there's some continuity at that position and that unit, do you feel like that's fueling any improvement that that group may have?

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GREG SCHIANO: Well, I think as an O-line, as the pieces play together more and more, they are a cohesive unit and there was a couple times -- Howard does some really good things schematically on defense. I thought they did a great job, and plugged some gaps.

You know, some of the blitzes they showed one and came in other areas, so hats off to them. But I think our guys did a good job of picking up a lot of stuff and passing it off, and that's all communication related. That's all being comfortable with one another.

So now can we keep getting better each and every week. That's going to be the key and can you keep your group healthy, can those five guys keep showing up each week because if they can they really get into a groove as one.

Q. Antwan Raymond, what did you see out of him in that performance? Can you take us through, unusual way to get here, right, early enrollee, as early as he was?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, you're right, Antwan Raymond I thought was very impressive but we've seen that. We've seen that in the summer in training camp. But very interesting the way he came. He was at Clearwater Academy down in Florida and they dropped their program.

So kind of the guys were all scrambling and we knew, or we came to know, that he was going to be eligible to graduate and if he wanted to re-class and come out in '24, we had a scholarship available for him and he decided to do that, he and his mom, and so excited. She and his sister and his girlfriend, they all came down to the game. And as I was leaving late Thursday night after doing a lot of recruits and things, they were still here and it was great to see the joy on their face.

That's the fun part of college coaching is you see the families just so involved and vested and enjoying the you can says of their sons or their brothers or their boyfriend. That's the pure part of it that keeps a guy like me coming back for more because it was really cool to see. He's got a lot of work to do but he's a talented young man.

Q. Troy Rainey was unavailable last game. Seemed like he was having a nice summer. What's his status, and what can you update?

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah, just for the rest of the year, just so you guys know, I'm just going to defer to an availability report. If there's a season-ending injury, that's something that I know is a timely deal but other than that I think the availability report kind of cleans it up for me.

Again, it will be a competitive disadvantage until we get into Big Ten play because Akron is not required to do it but we are two hours before kickoff. So I'm not complaining. I'm just saying, that's something that I'll lean into as our kind of way to communicate injuries and things.

Q. Two quick ones on quarterback. What does it do for you when you have a quarterback that can complete a majority of his passes? What does it do for you when you have a quarterback that is efficient, accurate in the passing game? How does that open up the offense?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, I agree, I thought Athan was efficient in his passing. It makes you more confident to throw the football, for sure.

But it allows to you have kind of a -- I know for Kirk, it allows him to kind of be able to ham-and-egg the play calling a little bit more, which, you know, each week's different, depending on what the defense gives you. But yeah, again, it's one game. Let's not get in front of ourselves.

But I was pleased with not only the way he played Athan but the way he prepared all training camp and then the spring. I think he's done a good job of coming in here as a newcomer and just kind of putting his head down and working, and by doing that, I think he's established himself as a leader in our program.

Q. Might have been matchup dependent, no passes beyond 20 yards, no real deep attempts in this game. Are you guys confident when that time comes that you do need some deep passes, stretching the field, that Athan is going to be able to do that for you guys?

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah, I'm very confident of that. We had a couple called. We got pressured on one of them -- actually, on two of them and a third one, they kind of threw a coverage at us that didn't really fit for the play call.

Yeah, but we'll push the ball down the field. Athan is very good at that. I'm not concerned. But you're right. We've got to hit them. Until you hit them, they are not a threat.

I appreciate it, and I always appreciate the way you cover our team. So thanks for coming out and we'll see you later this week.

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