

Rutgers University Football

Media Conference

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Greg Schiano

Press Conference

GREG SCHIANO: Certainly a tough, tough pill to swallow. Tough game. Great Big Ten football game out in Nebraska. Didn't go our way. So got back late, or real early Saturday morning. Came in yesterday and worked through it with the players, and moved on and getting ready for Wisconsin.

Q. Just defensively, what was the key kind of to that second half improvement?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, we made a couple mistakes in the first half. We mis-fit a run. We actually had a guy covered. Made a nice catch. Was right in his face and the guy made the catch.

I just think in the second half, one thing we did remarkably better from Washington to Nebraska is our tackling. That was a point of emphasis, and I think the guys really did a great job of improving that. Now we have to continue to that, ask Wisconsin has got some backs that they are strong. You know, they make people miss tackles. Why? Because they are very tough and they run through tackles.

So we are going to have to really bring it but that's something we've got to do. That's something that we're known for, and it was disappointing in the Washington game but we got back to -- I mean, it was really almost a model for how you should tackle. We missed two or three tackles at the entire defense, and generally as a defensive coach, you look at it and say, you'd like to be zero missed tackles.

But each level of the defense, usually allow for two; so D-Line, linebackers and secondary. If you come out of a game with six missed tackles against a Big Ten football team, that's pretty good. We had two. So big, big improvement. We've just got to keep getting better.

The thing I did like is we played a lot of people on defense. We are rotating five guys in the interior. We're rotating four guys on the -- or actually five guys on the edge, so we are playing ten guys. We're rotating three through the linebacker core. Timmy Hines got some play, and on the



back end we are rolling three corners and we're rolling three safeties, and when you do that -- like Sanders got in there and played well, again. He's a really good young football player.

Again to have Bo rolling now in the corner mix, and then Al-Shadee because of Robert being down. You know, we played that game only very little with Robert, very little with Ian, and obviously without Felter.

So I thought guys stepped up and did a really good job. And that's what you have to do. You have to build depth. You do it through development but until they go do it in a game, it's just a hope that there's depth there but there was.

So yeah, a lot to be encouraged. A lot to be encouraged by. We'll learn things from that game, and then you know, we'll try to get those fixed like we did from the Washington game.

It's always nicer to win from the W column, but didn't happen this week.

Q. Just generally your thoughts on Wisconsin, its strengths and what you see from their offense and defense?

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah, they are a good football team. Coach Fickell does a very good job. Has a real strong philosophy on how they want to play the game. Up front, their offensive line I think is big. They are strong.

You know, you just watch them play against good competition. They are good up front. They lost their starting quarterback and then the second team comes in Saturday and really lit it up against Purdue. You don't know what -- what that is there. There's not a lot of film to go off, a few games, and a little bit last year. You know, we'll create a plan on what they like to do offensively but we're going to have to stop the run and the pass.

And then when you flip them over on defense, they are really well-coached. Very sound. Big up front. They can run at linebacker, and really experienced in the secondary. You know, we know the corner very well, obviously, who



Pick-Sixed us last year. And the safety, I forget, 24, really good player. He seems like he's been playing forever.

But play-makers. They have some guys that can run. They are a run and hit group and they are big up front. So very, very sound at what they do. They know what they want to do, and I think they know how to fix things when they have a breakdown, they quickly fix it within the game.

So definitely a great challenge. But every week in the Big Ten is. What week isn't, right. The margin of error is very slim, as we saw Saturday. When you come out on the right end of it, you're really happy and excited. And when you come out on the wrong end like Saturday, you know, you've got to move forward now ask that's what we're doing with Wisconsin. They are very good, so a big challenge.

Q. Felter, can you just share details on the injury, when it happened and when you guys found out? And what effect does that have on the offensive line?

GREG SCHIANO: You lose a quality starter who has a lot of cumulative reps, right. He's a tough guy. He kind of brings that element. He brought that element to the O-line. It all unfolded as the week went on, which there were decisions that had to be made. We knew as we got toward the end of the week that that was going to be the way it was going to be.

And now he'll get -- eat be out this year. If you look at the flip side of it, he's back next year. So we have Bryan Felter and Mo coming back. Those are two really good players coming back in 2025, that's the way I look at it.

And we have a chance for young guys to step up, and that's already happened with D.J. playing a lot at linebacker for Mo and Taj White, there's a lot of things he's got to get fixed. But he went in there and he battled for 70 plays. That's a positive.

So we'll just keep moving forward. And Chin is going to have to help us there, as well. The young guys are getting their shot now. You've got to step up.

Q. Ben Black obviously had that one moment and was able to bounce back with the touchdown play. What did you just see from him his ability as a young player in the moment like that to be able bounce back?

GREG SCHIANO: It wasn't just Saturday's game. I've been impressed with Ben since he got here. You can see he's a really good player. And then he's done it in games in spurts. But you know, he the thing -- he made a great play. Awesome throw out of the end zone. Great play to

midfield. And later, hits him and he drops it.

And as a young receiver, to come back and then make a second great play and score on the touchdown, shows a lot about his competitive spirit. He's strong. He's a physically gifted freshman that has some toughness about him. So we'll keep developing him. We'll keep playing, and I think he'll just get better and better. I think he's got some special traits.

Q. All season long, the pass rush -- what did you see from week-to-week as the season's gone on and how do you think this pass rush can perform against Wisconsin who has not had a starting quarterback the last few weeks?

GREG SCHIANO: Great question and I probably should have talked about the four sacks, right, because as much of a concern as the tackling was against Washington, lack of pressure on the quarterback was a concern. You know, we won the Washington game and Washington left sick to their stomach, just like we left Nebraska sick to our stomach. Welcome to the Big Ten; that's part of the landscape

But we didn't get off the quarterback very well two weeks ago. This week I thought it was a different story, and I thought that our guys applied pressure, even when we weren't sacking, we were disrupting the quarterback's rhythm and that's very, very important. Everybody wants to talk about the sacks. But when you disrupt the rhythm, it shows on the other end. When the balls are errantly thrown, interceptions occur.

And like you said, it was different people from different levels of our defense. I was really excited about that. Something to build on, again. I think it gives these guys some juice now; let's go. There was a time here when we were really getting after the quarterback and we waned a little bit.

But that's a big part of what you have to do without giving up the run defense, again, when you go after the quarterback all the time. It's a delicate balance but you have to be able to do it. Otherwise, in this league, there's a lot of good quarterbacks who can throw with good timing that will make you pay.

Q. Bo, he was unavailable so much of last year. What does it say about the recruits you've brought in and the evolution of the process over the last two years?

GREG SCHIANO: I think it says two things. No. 1, as you said, the quality of prospect that we are able to attract to Rutgers. I think it says a lot good the coaching staff. The

amount of time they spend with these young guys helping develop the program. What does that mean? Spending a lot of time developing your younger players. As a coach, you always have this, it's not going away. So when practice is going away, you still have to do this and watch the tape and make recruiting calls.

So you spend a half hour after practice, that's a half hour later you're getting to bed. We have guys around this year that understand the significance of development, the coaches on our staff. I'm grateful for it because I know what it means as they are staying out there and doing some -- and it's not always -- sometimes it's walking and talking and explaining the why.

As young players start to understand the why, it really opens things up front. That's what I see our staff doing and just think, we have to just keep doing it, keep developing these players. We have some more young guys that we want to see play before this season is out. These aren't the only ones. It's just everybody kind of gets seasoned at a different time and then they are ready to get plugged in. Sometimes injuries, you know, are the cause but when we feel guys are able to go, we want to get them in the game.

Q. Wisconsin has normally been a smashmouth but the approach is now a little more shotgun, switched up a little more shotgun. With Kirk's play calling, do you ever see a scenario in short yardage or anything like that where you see Athan under center moving forward more often?

GREG SCHIANO: There are some plays, I think college football as a whole has gone to shotgun. There's very little under center. When we played Washington, Washington did some under center things. More than anything for the timing and rhythm -- rhythm of the pass game, they want to run. That's what we were solely -- back in the day, we only went to shotgun on third down, if we did on third down. The changes in offense and the things that have occurred over the years;

I think when you do that as your base and you do, you know, 80, 90 percent of your repetitions, to really get comfortable, it looks simple just to snap the ball and read the defensive end and read the linebacker, read the 3-technique. That takes so many cumulative repetitions. You can't be -- you don't want to be the Jack-of-All-Trades and masters of none. That's what we have to guard against.

Now, we do get under center sometimes and have some sneak game and things like that and we have some passes under center that just for the rhythm and timing, but to say that we'll ever go back, not with this current system, we're

going to be where we are.

And I get it, you sit there and say, well, if you're in the shotgun. But if you think about it, even when you're under center, where do you hand the ball off? It's about the same spot you take the snap, you come back and hand it off to about the same spot.

And quarterback sneak, where you're going to run the fullback which we don't have. You saw a couple fullback runs the last couple weeks, right, where they hand it to the fullback, maybe one or two in a game. Well, that's a quick hitter to a fullback.

Again, if you don't do that, that's a huge -- what we say in coaching is how expensive is it. Obviously you're not paying money. You're paying time. And if it's too expensive it takes away from what you are, and that's the age-old battle in coaching is if you spend time doing this, you're not doing what you're going to count on to win the game.

So a lot of thought goes into that, and look, I understand the question. I get it. We were down there and we didn't score. I mean, Coach Ciarrocca, myself, we sit there and go over and, over and over on Sunday and what should we have done. Those are the questions you ask. But then you have to make -- this is what we do; this is why we do it. We have to do it better. Are there any tweaks we want to make.

But then you've got to move on; otherwise you catch yourself. You've got to always be careful when you lose a tough game. You can't let that same team beat you twice. And I've had that to me over the years.

I'm not going to let that happen. We are going put everything into this Wisconsin season like we do every season. And if doesn't work out, it won't be because of the last game. It will be because Wisconsin will be better than we were. Let's lineup and find it out.

Q. White, Chin, do you anticipate competition for playing time?

GREG SCHIANO: It's too early to say. I think Tajh did a good job. He'll be the guy that's starting as long as he's healthy. But you know, chin is a guy that we've seen coming up, and if we have an opportunity to play two guys, certainly we'll do it. Just got to make sure that we feel that that's the best that gives us the best chance to win.

Q. College football, a lot of teams are seeing guys redshirt and into the transfer portal after four or five games. Have you had any conversations -- have any

players approached you and are you concerned at all that that's happening across the sport?

GREG SCHIANO: It is happening across America, you're right, and it's not four or five. It's when we've played in four because when you're playing five, you're done. The games themselves don't matter. What matters is how many games have you personally played in, right.

Do I anticipate it? No. You never know, though. How do you know? I'm sure some of those coaches didn't anticipate it either. It's a different age of college football. A lot of stuff going on, right. You just have to make sure that you're doing everything to make sure your program is in good order. Individuals have choices to make. That's been happening all over the country.

And we'll see. This will be historic, I think, what happens at the end of the season with the transfer portal. You know, all the things, this whole thing is just such a transformational time with revenue sharing on the docket, and who knows what it will look like in 12 months. Just hold onto your seat, you know.

Q. What was Athan's response in terms of what he was seeing on the film yesterday and mentally, emotionally, his ability to bounce back, what are you seeing?

GREG SCHIANO: Athan is an incredible competitor, as our whole team I feel is. We've grown up, and I think the young guys are following the lead of the older guys. That's as tough an environment as you can play in. Forget the 85,000 people that are very, very passionate about their Corn Huskers.

It was 95 degrees on your gauge. The temperature on the field when they came to me, they said it was 121 with the field turf and the pellets. My guys said it's 121 out there in pregame. I'm sure it came down as the game went on.

But road game, playing in someone else's hot stadium and it's hot, and they are tough and they are good. I was really proud of the way our team fought to the very last snap, and I mean, the very last snap.

And that's what we'll always do, and I'm convinced and I believe in our team; and I believe that we're going to come out this week and they are going to play as well as they have played all year, and we'll see where that stacks up. That's life in the Big Ten. That's why I love coaching in the Big Ten. That's why you should love covering the Big Ten. Because those are the kind of games that you get to witness.

Two weeks ago, we came out on the right end of it. Last week, we didn't. You've got to fight in this league and figure out how to come out on top. That's our goal. That's what we are trying to figure out how to do.

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