

Rutgers University Football Media Conference

Saturday, November 9, 2024

Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

Greg Schiano

Postgame Press Conference

Rutgers 26, Minnesota 19

GREG SCHIANO: Really proud of our team. It's pretty well chronicled, we are a little bit beat up right now but a bunch of guys laid it on the line for their teammates, and super proud of them. Super proud of our staff. They really busted their hump to get some things cleaned up and just a really good win for our program.

So try to answer any questions I can.

Q. It looked more like what we are used to seeing out of your team. What do you think the difference was today?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, we're a little bit -- just a little bit healthier, but I think the biggest difference is Coach Harasymiak literally stripped it down to the studs and rebuilt it in two weeks, which I don't think he slept. He and I talked a lot, and I'm just so proud of him; the leadership that he provided to the whole defensive staff and to our team.

The guys played for each other. That's the biggest thing that came today is they just literally put it on the line for each other and that was what we talked about all week. We don't really do themes around here but that became a theme.

You know, Military Appreciation Day today. We had an opportunity to have a really special Speaker, I'm not going to get into names and stuff. But he was a Navy SEAL, and he talked to our team about an exercise they do where you cover your head, they have a crazy environment and you have to take it off and you have to go and there's one of you and five of them and you have to get across the other side of the room. In all his years, he never saw it done.

But when you put five guys and 25 across the room, when they play and fight for the guy on the right and the guy on the left, they get across.

I told our team, I said, we've got to get across. We've got



to get across the room. That's the only way we are bog to get this one done. That's why at the end of the game we went over after we shook hands. We went over to the other side because that was the other side of the room, and the only way we were going to get there was doing it for each other.

Q. The defense has had some rough performances but your offense has clicked pretty well the last few weeks. What do you think has been the difference for that side of the ball?

GREG SCHIANO: I think we are just continuing to get better. There's no, like, "ah-ha" moment. I think everybody is getting more comfortable with the little details that are required, and the way we practice. We don't do a ton. We just try to do what we do, and try to do it exact and do it well.

I think our quarterback, Athan, did a heck of a job. He's been doing a heck of a job. He's getting better and better.

You know, really proud of those young backs today, with Kyle out, Ja'Shon Benjamin and Antwan, those guys, it's a true freshman, and a redshirt freshman. Really proud of them. There was one time I look out there, and we've got Ian and K.J. You know those guys are, again a freshman and a sophomore and Dymere Miller did a heck of a job. Proud of the guys. The offensive line fought their guts out against a really veteran defense, really veteran, really good. I was proud of them.

Q. Earlier in the week, you said this game didn't mean anything more given his former team. Did you see anything different from him during the week that maybe was a little bit extra significance or anything different from him?

GREG SCHIANO: I really didn't. Let's be real, we are all human, right. And it's not easy, especially when you get asked about it everywhere you turn.

But I thought what he did was he compartmentalized perfectly and got himself in a place where he could focus on the job at hand. He did a great job of it all the way to the very end of the game. Really, really proud. He's



getting better. The whole offense is just continuing, like we talked about, getting a little bit better every week. Really proud of those guys.

Q. You had an embrace with Athan after the game, and a lot of his teammates did, as well. He may not have looked at it as a different game, but did you get a sense that guys wanted to win this game with the emotions of the game?

GREG SCHIANO: I think they wanted to win it for each other, not just for Athan. I think that's one thing that really happened this week is we circled the wagon and said the only way we are going to do it -- think about it. Kyle is not playing, we have seven guys out for the year, leading sacker now declared, we just decided we can't keep. It's not worth it, right.

And Kyle, today, I mean, Kyle was close. He wanted to play. It killed him not to play today. But you don't mess around. You just don't mess around with a guy. Sometimes you've got to protect them from themselves. Not an easy thing to do, right. He's top rusher and has been.

But that's where I thought as a team they really just gave it up for each other. You know, you look at a guy like Tyreem Powell who obviously everyone knows has been playing hurt, playing in a lot of pain. I mean, the play of the game, right. He knocks that ball loose and it's old-fashioned bite the ball. It's no fancy schmancy. He put his face right on the ball and popped it out. Huge.

Q. For the defensive coordinator, the first half you guys didn't play with a lot of discipline on defense with eyes, hands coordination. But the second half, you cut all the big plays. What major adjustments did you make in the second half?

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah, I didn't see it that way to be frank with you. I thought we played really well in both halves defensively. We had a couple penalties, you know, that's uncharacteristic of us. We usually don't get those kind of penalties.

But I thought they played really hard the whole game. And that after the quarterback, we didn't get him down in the first half. That was the difference, right. We had him dead to rights and didn't get him down. In the second half we got after him and got him down. You look at that running back, he's a really good player. I think as a team, they maybe rushed for 30-something yards.

Again, hats off to those guys, and DJabome, just all year long a guy who comes out of nowhere, a guy today that I

thought really played well was Bo Mascoe. I mean, Bo oftentimes was on their best receiver, No. 9, and I tell you what, he played the way I know he can play.

So I think, again, for each other, they went out and kind of took some risks and laid it on the line, and again, proud of them.

Q. How important emotionally was that play by Tyreem, maybe even just broader, how important Tyreem, period, and his ability to play through that has been for this team?

GREG SCHIANO: Yeah, Tyreem is a fabulous talent. As I've said to you guys before, had he not got hurt at Indiana last year, he wouldn't be here right now. He was literally a top-50 pick. Every person that was coming into this building and coming to our practices, every scout, that's who they wanted to talk about. His stock was going through the roof. And it was sad because he had never gotten hurt, and all of the sudden he has the one injury, and then he's coming back from that and he gets a second injury. It was very unfortunate.

And then this year, he gets a muscle deal that has made him -- it just seems that he's a tough sucker because he keeps fighting. He keeps fighting, and the easy thing for him to do would be say, hey, I'm just going to heal up and rest on what I did the year before.

Not him. He's a great teammate, and that was a huge play in the game, though, right. Huge.

Q. How important is it to go out and win a game and get that feeling back?

GREG SCHIANO: It's very important. There's no doubt about it, right. When you're winning, you feel like you can't lose and then when you're losing sometimes, you feel like you can't win, especially when you lose a few in a row or like we did, four in a row. As a coach, my job is to step away and really look at it, like, okay, we did this well enough to win, we did this, and this is weighing killing us.

Like I said, Coach Harasymiak, Coach Ciarrocca, they did an incredible job leading their side of the ball, and Eddie Alan who works with me on special teams, he did an incredible job. Those three guys, great leadership, and they led their staffs, and then their staffs, in turn, led their players, and that's what it took. Took every last guy to get it done today.

Q. To build on that point, the toughness of the defense, you guys have been depleted all season, and this fourth quarter was very dominant. You guys put



on a dominant performance. How impactful and how important is that moving forward later in the season? What does that do for the confidence of the defense?

GREG SCHIANO: Well, I think it certainly should give them confidence. I think they got back to who they were today. And it has nothing to do with X's and O's, although X's and O's re important. And it's got nothing to do with technique; although I think technique is critically important.

I think that unit laid down the line for each other. Literally splattered their bodies all over the field for each other. That's how you make the plays. I stand up here often and talk to you guys and say, hey, football games take on a life of their own, and they do. They do. They make sharp turns.

And that hit by Tyreem Powell, that was one of those sharp turns. That writes the story. And we talk about, you write your own story, but too many times people want to make it about the whole story, the end of the story. You write the story one word at a time, not one sentence, not one paragraph, one word at a time. That's one play at a time; that's one drill at a time in practice; that's, you know, one treatment in the training room at a time, and that's what gets lost on people I think sometimes is they think about the big end result.

Q. Could you speak to Ja'Shon Benjamin in particular in the second half, and the fourth quarter seemed to be his hardest running.

GREG SCHIANO: We know, we call him Bengie. We know Bengie is a really good back. We set out this year if we could to redshirt him. And fortunately we are able to.

Now, he had not played and now we have four -- three games left now but he played and he can play in all four of these, and then play in the postseason and still keep his redshirt year.

So that was the plan. I'm glad that we were able to do it. But man, did he step up. Now you've got to remember, think back to the Northwestern game here, the opener. Bengie really showed what he can do.

And I think Antwan, I think we have some good young backs around here. Certainly when you lose your first team guy, and we already lost our second team guy, who really isn't a second team, Sam was a co-first team guy. When you lose those two guys, you're down to three and four, and they step up, that's impressive.

Q. Obviously your offense has been playing better. How much credit do you give to the way the offensive

line has played the last couple weeks? I know it's tough to see in games like this but just generally, your thoughts on the offensive line and the importance of a guy like Hollin Pierce?

GREG SCHIANO: I think the offensive line, you know, you don't hear me saying it any more, like as the O-line goes, we'll go, because the O-line is performing like a Big Ten offensive line.

Are we at the top yet? No. But we can go out and play with anybody and perform. Sometimes we get beat, right. We're not world beaters but we play well, and Coach Flaherty does an unbelievable job, he and his staff with those guys and you've got a guy like Hollin Pierce who is a legitimate, big-time player. He'll play in the NFL for a long time. So we're talking about good players.

Yeah, so I think they are doing a good job. The guy I didn't mention who I want to is Jakob Anderson, and he did a really good job, I thought, punting the ball today. That's a big, big play in those games, the field position, and I think he was an important part, and then Scullion did a good job kicking off. I think those were important plays in the game.

Proud of our guys. Really grateful for all the military personnel that got honored today. I think -- I know I do, I value the heck out of those people. They give us the opportunity to do what we do, and it's a small way to honor them but I thought that was really cool.

And again, the message we got from one of those military personnel on Friday and then the message we had from our speaker on Friday night all aligned. So God had a plan for us today and this week, and I'm grateful for that.

Thanks, guys.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports ...

