

Wisconsin Football Media Conference

Saturday, October 22, 2022

Madison, Wisconsin, USA

Head Coach Jim Leonhard

Postgame Press Conference



Wisconsin 35, Purdue 24

THE MODERATOR: Some opening comments from coach and then we'll take questions.

JIM LEONHARD: Obviously, extremely proud of our group. Just the way that they approached the week after a tough loss, learning some tough lessons at Michigan State.

To see them handle the emotions early in the week and focus on the game plan and just to see how they started the first half offensively and defensively and then to match that in the second half. Just really proud of what our guys were able to get done today.

Q. You mentioned responding from a tough loss. I'm just curious, this team earlier in the season had difficulty responding to adversity in games. It's only been three games since you took over, but do you see this team growing in that area, being able to respond whether it's in a loss from a week or from bad play in the middle of a game?

JIM LEONHARD: I think we're seeing a lot of growth. We had a young, inexperienced team. A lot of guys stepping up into different roles or transitioning into the program from other places where I knew we had to learn a lot about this group early in the season, and we found out a ton.

It's good to see the response. You know, we're getting better. The effort has been there. Now you're seeing a little bit better execution, which is how we got the result from today.

Q. How do you guys try to manage practice this week with so many guys in and out of the line-up and trying to get back healthy? How have you tried to balance guys that are trying to get back, getting them some rest, seeing what they can do versus guys you know who you are going to play the bulk of the reps?

JIM LEONHARD: That's the balancing act. Week in and

week out, what's the best plan to give you a chance on Saturday?

It's been a juggling act with guys in and out, banged up, number of guys missing early in the week, late in the week. Just trying to figure out what the best game plan for that group is and what's too much really.

And physically it's the same thing. You need to practice. You need to get better. But at the same time the emphasis has to be on Saturday. What gets your team in the best position to win? I think we've done a pretty decent job.

We've had a lot of conversations on it, feedback from the coaches, from the players, just what's right. I think our guys trust the plan we've had the last couple of weeks, and I think they were fresh today and played with a lot of confidence.

Q. Jim, with John Torchio last year against Purdue with 1 yard away from a pick-6. Today, obviously, comes away with one on another interception and another pick-6 for the season as well. What does he do so well in that defensive back field that allows him to jump in front of those passes to make those plays?

JIM LEONHARD: I'm proud of him. He got better. He got in the end zone this time.

But he has got such high football IQ, understands our scheme, understands offenses and how they attack. Then you add on top of that the timing. You know, it's not every safety has that. It's a skill that is hard to teach, and he has kind of had that from day one. We noticed that.

Every time he is staring at the quarterback, he has an opportunity to make a big play. It's our job as a defense to win enough downs to get in some situations to allow him to do that.

Just proud of him, man. He has been through a lot this last year. To see his growth as a leader, to see his growth as a player, you are just excited when the results are there on game day, and they perform well.

Q. That late touchdown that was upheld, it appeared



you disagreed with the call. I'm wondering what you saw and then what they told you.

JIM LEONHARD: I thought we made a great play. Obviously, it's about as close as it gets.

They said they didn't have a view straight down the goal line, which leads me to the question of, Why? Why is it not straight down the goal line?

They didn't have enough to overturn it. I don't agree with it, but it doesn't really matter.

So, unfortunate how the game ended, kind of bleeding a little bit on defense at the end. Needed to force another turnover to close it off a little bit better.

Q. I know you leave the offensive decisions up to the coaches. Braelon was in there late. He had been banged up. Just what kind of conversations as a staff do you have about especially managing him with the injuries, and how important is a week line this to have off for him given the workload he has?

JIM LEONHARD: A week off for him is huge this time of year. He understands his role. He wants to be the work horse. He asks for more all the time.

I think Coach Alvarez said around here, The ball is not that heavy. So we still believe that a little bit.

We have to be smart. We know that, but we needed to close the game off. It was getting tight enough that we felt it was important to have him in the game.

I'm excited for the week off for him because he has definitely been carrying a heavy burden. Especially since Chez went down. He has earned his time off.

Q. Defensively just your thoughts of most of the fourth quarter you guys did a nice job of containing O'Connell and their passing game. What went into that, and what kind of stands out to you about the defensive effort?

JIM LEONHARD: First of all, that's a very dynamic offense. They've got great skill. They have great scheme, and the quarterback is playing at an extremely high level coming into this week.

You know you have to mix looks up. You have to stop the run. You have to get them behind the sticks at times, which we did a great job different moments throughout the game getting them to second and long, third and long situations.

You have to be a little unpredictable against them because if they get a bead on how you're attacking them, the scheme is too good, and the quarterback does a tremendous job of reading coverages and getting the ball where he wants to.

They hit some good plays. I mean, they did a great job on offense. They can put up points and yards in a hurry.

Q. Was that first quarter what you thought this team could be?

JIM LEONHARD: That's what you hope every week, right? It's not always that clean, but I think the energy, the attention to detail early in the game, just doing your job and finishing plays. That's all you can ask your players to do and being willing to make adjustments and communicate on the field and on the sideline.

Our guys did a great job of that early in the game. They had confidence in what we were asking them to do, and they finished. They made some big plays and got a ton of momentum and energy in the stadium.

Q. This is just one game, but do you think Graham took another step in that regard? He had a couple of big throws, but he did not turn the ball over. And that's been a problem Illinois, Michigan State, Ohio State. Their guy did; your guy did not turn the ball over today.

JIM LEONHARD: Every time you go through a game clean without turning the ball over, you gain confidence as a quarterback. We're learning so much about that receiving group.

You add the tight ends. That's been mix and match. Just what's the best thing for those skill guys to have success?

Obviously, Graham pulling the trigger, he has a lot of decisions to make. It's fun to see him playing with confidence.

I thought he threw a lot of balls where you felt it, right? When quarterbacks are playing with confidence, you just see the way the ball comes out of their hands, you see the reaction as they release and throw it. He is doing a great job of learning defense, right?

I think he is doing a much better job of seeing coverages and understanding where matchups are, and you're seeing that with his decision-making and the confidence in which he is throwing the ball.

Q. This is going to seem like lame question, but after what you guys went through last week against Michigan State, to come out there and punch Purdue in the mouth a little bit and to get your first win at the Camp, how does that feel for you?

JIM LEONHARD: It means a lot. Wisconsin, Camp Randall, it means so much to me. And to see the players respond and to me, right, what my messaging is and the confidence I'm trying to pour into them, it means so much.

Coming back to homecoming and coming back in town and seeing the support that I have with them, friends, family, team, coaches, you name it. I gain a lot of confidence from that.

It just allows me to go out there and have trust in our guys and what we're doing around here. Just very excited to get this first win and get that one behind me and now continue on to the rest of the season.

Q. Now that that is behind you, how do you feel about where your team is at heading into the bye week?

JIM LEONHARD: Number one, they're playing hard. They're playing extremely hard. We went 3 for 3. My goal was how fast can we get this thing turned around and have some success hopefully going into the bye week?

We've done that. We felt like we let one slip last week, but guys are playing extremely hard. And I think you're starting to see a little bit more detail. You're seeing more consistency. Guys just kind of trust in doing their job and finishing plays.

That's the simple message of football sometimes. I think when you go through struggles, you just have to take the step back and kind of get back to the fundamentals. We've done that. And like I said, guys are playing very hard. Now we're playing a little better football at this point.

Q. Jim, with Nick Herbig suited up, but didn't see the field. What led to him not playing? But, also, how do you feel Cade and Darryl stepped up in his place too?

JIM LEONHARD: As with a number of guys throughout the season, banged up and very, very limited during the week. Nick loves to play. He loves to play, and we knew we would have him on a very limited pitch count if he was going to be available.

As the flow of the game happened, we were able to keep him off the field, which I think is the best decision for him.

But proud of that group. They had to step up and have a

big game. I'm excited to watch the tape. Any time guys get that expanded role, it's a little bit hard sometimes to see unless they're making huge plays, but I'm really excited to see them play. They've earned the opportunity. It's fun to look at some of these young guys on the field and having success.

Q. You kind of mentioned on Thursday we might not get next week. What's the plan for the bye week? You mentioned the recruiting, all the guys you want to get healthy. How do you balance next week with those goals in mind?

JIM LEONHARD: We have a group of guys that need a lot of rest, and that's going to happen for them. We have a chunk that needs to play and get back. We're getting a number of guys kind of back from injuries where they need some snaps. They kind of need to knock some rust off. It's going to be a balancing act on what's the right amount.

Obviously, we're going to get ahead of that Maryland game a little bit and get a little bit of game-planning in and some meetings that way, and coaches need to get on the road and recruit.

A little all over the place next week. I'm excited. I think a big part of the plan with the players because there's enough uncertainty within the program. It's just sit down and talk with them. Where are we at currently? What would happen if I get this job?

I think I need to address that with them. It has not been the right time to do that, but I think the bye week leads to a little bit of what would the future possibly look like, knowing that there's not an answer right now.

I'm excited to kind of let them see a little bit of what the vision would be, but there's still work to do here the second half of the season to make it a reality.

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