

Wisconsin Football Media Conference

Saturday, November 26, 2022

Madison, Wisconsin, USA

Jim Leonhard

Postgame Press Conference



Minnesota - 23, Wisconsin - 16

JIM LEONHARD: First off, I want to give Minnesota credit. They came in here and executed their game plan and found a way to get a win. They played physical and got after us a little bit up front. We need to find a way to finish close games. That's been an issue throughout the course of the season. We got it done last week but weren't able to rally and finish this one off.

Q. Jim, the offense closed the game with three straight three and outs and then the interception and obviously the last drive with the penalties. I know this is a broad question, but what do you think needs to be improved or fixed here with this offense moving forward just to get it playing at the level that it needs to play at?

JIM LEONHARD: I think, number one, finishing drives. We moved the ball, again, early, and we're settling for field goals. Then late when we have momentum, you'd like us to continue to push, flipping the field at least, and you've got to continue to push in the second half.

We had a long stretch there where we weren't moving the football, and then we had a chance. We were able to hold them to that missed field goal and give them a chance, and Wolfy did a great job leading them down the field. Obviously it was an ugly, ugly finish.

We need to find a way to win this game. Defensively we've got to close it off. Offensively we need to continue to find ways to put points on the board.

Q. What were the biggest challenges defensively in terms of stopping their passing game?

JIM LEONHARD: They threw the ball significantly better than I would have anticipated. Whether it was -- they had some good schemes versus our zone coverages, and then man coverage they were winning, making plays. We have to challenge better on the outside.

Give the quarterback credit. He came in with little experience and executed their offense at a high level and threw the ball significantly better than I would anticipate going in. I give him a lot of credit for that, and like I said, the receivers had a big day, and it was one I didn't expect.

Q. I know you had that last series, you've got your backup quarterback in there who's played one game, hasn't attempted a pass all year, but is there any excuse for the penalties that pushed you guys from the 5 back I think eventually to the 30.

JIM LEONHARD: It wasn't the quarterback causing penalties. So I think Chase came into a really tough situation there. Cold, hasn't played all game, and he executed at a high level, gave us a chance. He moved the ball down the field. Protection was good. Receivers were making plays.

First and goal on the 5 can't end the way that it ended. It got really sloppy there. It's unfortunate. It really is. It's frustrating to walk off the field that way after sitting there at first and goal on the 5 yard line with plenty of time to take our shots.

Q. It seemed like you were blitzing quite frequently and trying to get into Athan's face. Do you think that he handled the pressure better than you have anticipated with the limited experience he has?

JIM LEONHARD: Yeah, he did a great job. It's a lot of match protection looks off of their run. Their run, RPO, play action passes all tie together, and it's a difficult offense to defend.

I thought we did a good job handling the run game for the majority of the day, and we're going to force our guys to play one-on-ones and win one-on-ones, and that's what that style of offense does as well. So they executed on the perimeter, and they won those matchups and moved the ball too well in the air.

Q. When did you know you wouldn't have Braelon this week, and how much, if at all, do you think that impacted things offensively given the load he's taken



for most of the season?

JIM LEONHARD: We knew middle of the week at best we'd be limited in what he can provide, and we just felt it was best to hold him in this one. He's a grinder. He's a warrior. He's done that all season for us. It just got to the point where the best decision for him was to sit.

Proud of that running back group stepping in and running hard, running physical, showed up in big moments. Obviously I.G. had the big one at the end again just to get us rolling, get a first down. They battle. It's a competitive group that wants to be on the field and wants touches. So just proud of them for stepping in for Braelon like that.

Q. Coach, I'm sure being a first time head coach in an interim situation, taking over midseason, a lot of what you're doing is kind of trial by fire in some sense. I'm curious, after seven games, what's been the hardest or most challenging part for you just in terms of trying to get this team to take that next step? It seems like one step forward, one step back through these seven games here.

JIM LEONHARD: Yeah, we went through a lot of adversity, and we learned a lot about this team. There's certain things I don't like, we need to improve. We need to win games, flat out, right? That's our job. That's our goal here is to be competitive in the Big Ten and win football games.

We've gotten inconsistent results, and we've been a program who's prided ourselves on disciplined play and not beating ourselves, and that's continued. That's continued this second half of the season in the games that we've lost.

So we have our work cut out for us, and hopefully I'm the person to lead us in that direction because I've got a lot of confidence I'll get it done, but that still needs to improve.

Q. I was going to find of follow up on that, the penalties. I think with C.J. Goetz with that roughing which eventually led to a field goal, is that a lack of discipline on things like that? I think it was a chest bump.

JIM LEONHARD: Yeah, some of them I didn't see, to be honest. As the drive was going on, I wasn't able to see some of the replays at the end of plays with quarterback stuff.

Q. He got rid of the ball and like a second or two, and Goetz just kind of bumped him chest to chest.

JIM LEONHARD: That would be a bad decision, right?

We have to be disciplined around the quarterbacks. You know they're protected. You know they're going to take care of quarterbacks in college football, and we have to make smart decisions.

We want to be aggressive. We want to pressure the quarterback, and you have to know when to pull off. Obviously if we're getting penalties, we've got to coach it better and put them in a better position to have success.

Q. Jim, I'm sure there are a lot of position groups you think need improvement, and not dependent on one group or one guy, but is it safe to say you need better play from the quarterback? Is that pretty obvious?

JIM LEONHARD: Consistent quarterback play is going to give you a chance every week, right? That's what that position -- that's how valuable that position is to football. So whatever it takes, we have to create competition, and whatever it takes, you have to get consistent play out of the position. That's the position that it is.

There's a lot of pressure on it. They've got the ball in their hands every play. Graham is up for the challenge. He loves that challenge. That's what he loves about playing the position. We have to continue to push to improve in a number of areas. Obviously that's one of them.

Q. We talk a lot about eye discipline, especially against an offense like this. Do you feel like your corners and safeties lost that at times, especially some of those slants that went for big plays?

JIM LEONHARD: It's hard to say without watching the tape. The run, the RPOs, the play action pass, it all looks the same for them. You have to play discipline. You have to -- you've got to have a great day reading receivers as well. Got to study the tape on that one. It's not something that you walk off the field and see big issues.

Number of plays down the field, we've got to make one-on-ones. They went up and got it. Flipped the field too many times. Created momentum, you said, on the penalties. Just felt like for long stretches of the game we were kind of on our heels on defense.

Q. Jim, just in the locker room, this team, program has been through a lot this year, both on and off the field. What was your message to the team after the loss, knowing that you all still have one more game together?

JIM LEONHARD: We're going to find a way to get better. It's not over. The season's not over. We're fortunate enough to win enough games to earn the bowl game, and

we've got to finish this out the right way. I have to find ways to get us better -- offense, defense, special teams. We have to become better.

I hope I'm given the opportunity to push this program forward in all areas here in the near future. Big task, but I'm excited for the opportunity.

Q. Not to beat a dead horse, but have you had a sit-down with Chris that you would consider an official interview, or what's next from here?

JIM LEONHARD: We were able to sit down earlier this week and had a great conversation. I think that's between us, what was said, but hopefully there's decisions that are made soon in the best interests of this university.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports