

Wisconsin Football Media Conference

Saturday, October 14, 2023
Madison, Wisconsin, USA

Luke Fickell

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa 15, Wisconsin 6

LUKE FICKELL: They beat us in every phase of the game today, tonight, this afternoon. It's pretty obvious. Give them a lot of credit.

But offensively, defensively and particularly special teams, they made the plays when they needed to. Neither one of us I think could sustain much offensively. But they make one huge play, and we have some opportunities with the ball tipped in the air, and we just don't come down or make the play. That makes it pretty even in some ways.

I thought they dominated us special teams-wise. Their punt team flipped the field on every occasion. We had way too many penalties that really made it difficult on us offensively.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Initial update on Tanner?

LUKE FICKELL: No, I don't know. It doesn't look good for a little while. He couldn't grip the ball. We'll have to make sure we find out what the deal is tomorrow, see how long that may last.

Q. The offense was struggling before Tanner got hurt. Iowa certainly has a sound defense. Do you feel like your offense is still trying to find what its identity should be?

LUKE FICKELL: No, I don't think they're trying to find what their identity needs to be. I think we're trying to find how it fits with the people we have as much as anything.

But we got to do a better job, I told 'em in the locker room. I thought first and foremost, they did a better job coaching than we did today. I'm the first one, right? When you look at the whole field position battle, the things you need to do to win a game like this, a rivalry game, I can honestly tell you, our guys respected the heck out of, prepared I thought



as good as we have this entire season.

But when it comes down to it, we didn't get it done.

Q. How would you evaluate how Braedyn Locke played today?

LUKE FICKELL: We'll go back and watch. It was a tough situation. It wasn't like we were moving the football and we didn't have anything really established, whether it was the run game or making some plays on the outside. It was a battle, hard-fought. Gets thrown into a situation like that that makes it very, very difficult.

I thought they did a great job at pressuring, keeping us off balance. I think we got to do a better job protection-wise to give our quarterbacks a better chance.

Q. Obviously did a good job defensively on third down. Were there some instances where your receivers didn't get to the sticks on their route or...

LUKE FICKELL: I don't know. I mean, there's a few of those situations, which puts us in those tough calls there, going for it. I know everybody (indiscernible) about the first series of the game. We go for it and get stopped. Had you known it was going to be as tight as it was going to be, maybe you do things different.

But the reality is kicking field goals is not going to win football games. That's the difference. They got a safety and things like that. They got the one big play that leads to a touchdown. That's as much as anything the difference in the game.

If we find a way to get him down at the 10 yard line, whatever, who knows what happens, like last week. I think there's a lot of things like that, whether it's first down, third down, whatever those situations are, we got to figure it out.

Q. When you said that you're still trying to find how your identity fits your players, is that because of injuries?

LUKE FICKELL: I think in some ways. I think the limitations we've had at the tight end position, because



injuries, as well. So all those things fitting into what you're doing.

Then I think maybe they didn't recognize how stout this defense really was, how much they can limit you to a lot of things that you do.

You give 'em a lot of credit. They lost two first-round draft picks from last year's defense. I don't know that they have taken much of a step backwards. There's a lot of credit to be given to them that forced us into the situations we had tonight, especially on third down.

Q. Did today feel like it was one of those days, everything you did, you continued to make some great plays, all of a sudden things fell apart, seems like you were running through the mud.

LUKE FICKELL: There was no flow of anything. You know things are hard to come by. There was no flow of anything. If we did make a play, a first down, all of a sudden you look back at it and you're second and 12.

We think we moved the ball, we're going to play the battle of field position, they punt the ball 65 yards, and you get a penalty on the play to put it back to the six yard line.

We were fighting uphill in a lot of things all day. But you know what, you got to make some of your own breaks. The breaks that were out there, we didn't end up capitalizing, whether the ball is tipped in the air, things like that.

To me, it's hard, but you come in there and it's like there's not a whole lot to say, right? We got beat in every phase of the game. They out-physicaled us, they out-rushed us. All those things.

I'm not saying that about the players, I'm saying that of myself. They were better prepared. I thought we did a great job all week.

Q. How do you envision altering the offense to some of the skill sets that Braedyn has versus what Tanner brings?

LUKE FICKELL: We'll have to figure that out based on what the situation is with Tanner. If it's going to be a longer situation, we'll have to probably tailor a little bit. We'll have to create some competition as well. That's the great thing about having that room, having those guys.

There's a lot of things we got to figure out. Like I said, it starts with where Tanner is, how long that might be, to where we need to do a better job putting ourselves in

situations where third downs are much more manageable.

Q. There was two straight series in the first half all passes. Do you think you got away from the running game too much?

LUKE FICKELL: Yeah, maybe. Almost like we were walled into some of those plays throwing the football. It looks like you got a chance to make some plays down the field, then, yeah, you're sitting there with one tailback. Braelon is inside. They're checking him out. You're at a little bit of a tougher situation trying to figure out how this is going to play out as we continue to move forward.

Sometimes that puts you in the situation where all of a sudden you look back, you've thrown the ball eight straight times. I don't think that's good for any of us.

Q. Braelon did reach those three thousand career rushing yards. What does it mean to work with a guy that has had a career like that?

LUKE FICKELL: He's a phenomenal player, he's a phenomenal kid. He's got so much more growth that he's going to be better and better and better. He's one of those guys at halftime said, We're going to have to put a lot of things on your shoulders.

To be honest with you, I thought he ran as hard and physical in that second half has I've ever seen him. Obviously it wasn't enough. Maybe we need to just flat out give it to him some more there in those situations.

To be honest with you, he's a guy that showed me a little something out there today.

Q. You mentioned the offensive line giving the quarterback a little more time. Do you think it was what Iowa as doing in terms of different pressures or...

LUKE FICKELL: I do think there were too many free runners like the safety, right? I don't know exactly what the protection was and what the situation was, but there's two free runners at the quarterback. He's got nowhere to go.

It's easy to point a finger, look at the quarterback and say, Throw it away. He's in a situation where he's trying to make some plays. We're down as it is.

But I think that's where we've got to put the pressure on. Braedyn is going to be in there, there's going to have to be a little bit more put upon the Jack Nelsons and those guys up front that have a lot of experience to take over for us a little more.

Q. You've been in this league a long time. Iowa wins games like this all the time. Frustrating I'm sure, but somewhat amazing that they can be like that and still win?

LUKE FICKELL: Yeah, I mean, I said it before. They asked about the quarterback. I said he does what the Iowa quarterbacks do and what they need to do. What is that? It could be anything, right? It could be anything on any given day.

That's where I think ultimately you can look at it, they got a great culture of what it is they do. They lost their top player on offense in Erick All early on. Didn't change exactly what they were going to do. They stuck with it. They knew they were playing well defensively. They didn't have to put themselves in a lot of situations to take some chances.

That's where as a whole we've got to do a better job. We talk about complementary football. If we can put them in some situations where we made them have to make some plays on offense, I think we could find ways to create some more things.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports