

Wisconsin Football Media Conference

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Luke Fickell

Postgame Press Conference



Northwestern Wildcats 24 - Wisconsin Badgers 10

LUKE FICKELL: There's not much of a statement. That's embarrassing, and I take the blame of it and not having guys ready, and not at any phase of the game. It's not a whole that can be said, or I can say. I'll answer questions. But it's very difficult trying to figure out where we are and what we need to do to continue to move forward, but we're going to have to do that.

Q. Let's focus a little bit on the defense. You're a defense-minded guy. Your guys have done a good job in the second half of games pretty much all season, but the first half, have you been able to pinpoint what the issue has been?

LUKE FICKELL: No. Obviously we were awful in the first half, couldn't get off the field. We made some, obviously, major mistakes. The third down stuff frustrates you. They're going to make some plays, but the complete blown coverages on two touchdowns really, really put us in a tough situation, and we were kind of spinning and spiralling and just couldn't get anything gathered together and get somebody to step up.

Q. So you guys get that field goal on the first drive, and it seemed like offensively you couldn't stream together the third downs.

LUKE FICKELL: We gotta get on the ball. Momentum got completely shifted and changed. Get 16, 17 plays legitimately in the first half, it's hard to find a rhythm and get things going. I think obviously altogether it's not one area, it's not one issue. It's not just getting off the field on third downs on defense or completing third downs on offense. It's finding a way to play some complementary football that gives you a chance to win.

Q. You talked about not having your players ready. On Monday you had said a similar thing in terms of what you wanted to improve this seasons. Why do you think there's been a consistent issue with

preparation and not being ready necessarily to play defense?

LUKE FICKELL: I mean if I had that answer, I think we would have changed a lot of different things. It's not that our guys -- I said it on Sunday. They came out and had a good night. They did a good job. It's the ability to consistently continue to do the things the rest of the week that give you a chance to perform and play at the level you need to play at. For some reason right now we're not able to do that. I think we have pretty good weeks, and then when you get out there on Saturday, the ability to adjust and adapt to maybe a few new things, especially in the first half, we just have not found a way to be able to do.

Q. When a team comes with in such high expectations of their own and doesn't accomplish that, it can have an effect that goes on the rest of the season. Do you think you've lost some of those teams? Do you think they've tuned you out in any way?

LUKE FICKELL: I don't know that about. I think the expectation sometimes obviously has made it not difficult, but when you get put in a situation, it gets almost like you can see you get down on how well we can't do what we had originally had set out to do. And I think sometimes you gotta find a way to get over top of that. And right now we have not. Regardless of what we thought and what people thought we could or should be able to do at the beginning of the season, the reality is is where you are, and it takes leaders. It takes guys to be able to step up. It takes coaches to be able to continue to push through based on the situations we're in, and we gotta do a better job.

Q. You've talked about not playing complementary football and not finishing games. It's probably tough big picture right now to think about this. What would you say are the most significant issues as to why the team hasn't --

LUKE FICKELL: There's not a single complementary thing right now that we're doing and I don't think we've done in the last couple of weeks, to be honest with you. So it's very difficult, and we're going to have to figure that out and some way, somehow based on -- the only way you're going to win football games and win in this league is to be able to



do that and to play complementary football, and right now we're not able to do it, but we will find a way, and we will continue to push and that's what I said in the locker room afterwards. There's a lot of things we gotta figure out in these last couple weeks, and we can't look at the next Saturday yet. We're going to have to look at tomorrow and we're going to have to be one day at a time and one practice at a time, one moment at a time, and find a way, with the guys we got, and the guys that want to be here and the guys that want to do it, to push forward and do the things that we can do and do them better.

Q. Coach, they had 11 third-down conversions. What that were they doing well that led to that?

LUKE FICKELL: Anything and everything. Very hot the first half. Made some plays, hit some balls. But those hurt. Those obviously extend drives, keep them in the possession. I think the big ones, the ones that we kind of blew there for touchdowns are the ones that are the daggers, and I think that the frustration of a few first downs, especially on the third down situations, caused us probably a little bit too much anxiety, and that probably helped a big part of us busting during the couple of touchdown throws, which you can handed. We've done a decent job of people moving the football, and then we kind of settle in, especially missed third downs in particular in the first part of the game or the first half. But we haven't given up the easy touchdowns, the ones that are completely blown type of situations that just compound everything that you're doing, and that's where tonight very, very, very disappointing, in a lot of different ways, but I think the ability and the frustrations to give up the really big plays at those moments, and I'm talking about the two touchdowns in the first half that are just complete busts on our part.

Q. About Northwestern what you saw from them when we talked to you on Monday. You said they know who they are. Do you think the way they came in and executed early, that that was a sharp, prepared team? I know it's tough to tip your cap to an opponent at a moment like this, but --

LUKE FICKELL: They did a good job. And your job is to not allow them to be sharp and to be on point. And so you can tip your cap and say they did a good job, but we also did a real poor job. And we've gotta find a way to do a hell of a lot better job, whether it's first half, second half, whatever. It second doesn't matter. It's a 60-minute football game, and right now we aren't playing 60 minutes by any means.

Q. With Braylen got in the game first couple of offensive series and then not after that. It appeared like was there any update on him in terms of why he

started it --

LUKE FICKELL: No. We didn't know if he was really going to be able to go, and the situation, it didn't seem like he was able to kind of let loose and go. And we kind of gave him the opportunity, and we had to maybe see it in the first few -- first drive or so there. But I think it became a little bit evident that it didn't feel like he was good enough to go.

Q. The offensive line seemed to struggle. Seemed like they were bringing some linebackers and safeties late. What did you see running game wise?

LUKE FICKELL: It didn't click at all. I don't know that late in the game. It didn't click at al. We ran a couple draw plays. That would be embarrassing to Wisconsin football to say you ran the ball on a couple draw plays. The reality is we couldn't run the football, regardless of whatever the situation was, whether they were bringing safeties down, whether they were running linebackers. We have to be able to run the football. We gotta be able to get off the field on third down. There's just a lot of things that add up to give you a really difficult night, and it's -- I hope it doesn't get any lower than this.

Q. You made a reference to finding out who wants to be here. How do you go about doing that? There's a lot players on this team. How do you find that out?

LUKE FICKELL: We'll find out this week.

Q. Second quarter when you guys were down 14-3, you ended up putting on fourth and three. What went into the decision for that?

LUKE FICKELL: I can't remember the exact time and when that one was, but when we're not playing good enough on defense, it's really difficult to give them a short field to be aggressive. So at that point in time I think, if that's the one I'm thinking about, we got it down to the eight yard line and then the next play they run for 42 yards on a replace around the edge. Hindsight, yeah, maybe should have just went for it, if we didn't get it, we'd be right back where you were after the one play. All those things make it decision really difficult when you're not playing very well. So when you're playing really well and you make a bad decision, they overcome it. When you're playing really poorly and you think you make a good decision, turns out to be a bad one. So they kind of go hand in hand. Either way if we don't find a way to play better football, all decisions will be bad.

Q. How much is a lack of identity on both sides of the ball hurting you guys right now?

LUKE FICKELL: I don't know. I mean I thought we had an identity a little bit more on defense. We didn't play well tonight at all. I think offensively it's hurting us. Trying to find a way to have some balance, which right now we have none. And so that identity of being able to do that, there's things you want to do and there's things that all of a sudden you recognize you can't do. And it makes it really difficult when you have this vision of what your identity wants to be. But you really -- as you get into it you start to recognize that I don't know that you can do that. So we've gotta do a better job of being able to adjust whatever that identity is and find ways to win football games right now.

Q. Getting back to the decision making process, are you a guy who goes by your gut a lot where --

LUKE FICKELL: There's no analytics right now that's going to put us in a better situation. We use it. We look at it. You try to manage games with it, to be more aggressive. And then you do have to get a feel for there's a lot of other things that analytics don't take into consideration and --

Q. That was my question. I mean, for example, if your defense is playing well, you maybe go for it there.

LUKE FICKELL: Oh, there's no doubt. There's no doubt. You put yourself in those situations, like last week, playing good defense, and you know, after the first series or two and so you're going to put yourself in those situations, and when you're not, it's like I said, all decisions become very, very difficult.

Q. At what point in the week did you know that you were going to have Tanner available and how did you think he handled come being --

LUKE FICKELL: I don't know. We assumed Tuesday and Wednesday at practice and, okay, I think he can do it. But even as we warmed up today, I'm like, okay, now what's it really going to feel like? What's it going to be like when you do get tackled? So there's still game-time decisions that kind of like you said with Braylon. I think we're going to give him an opportunity to go, but you put them in there and if they can't go, they can't go.

Tanner is a tough dude, and whether it's three weeks outside of surgery, I thought he did as good as he could do probably in a lot of situations. But he's fighting through a lot.

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