

Stanford University Football

Media Conference

Saturday, November 5, 2022
Stanford, California, USA

Coach David Shaw

Postgame Media Conference



Washington State - 52, Stanford - 14

COACH SHAW: I've never used excuses. And I won't start now. Never just have been involved in a game where we lose four defensive starters on the opening drive.

We prepare our backups to play, get them out there. Try to get them going. But that was really difficult today, really difficult. Because the only way to combat it is on the offensive side. We lacked snaps. We lacked experience and some key positions.

Jacob Mangum-Farrar was out already as a senior leader for us in the linebacker room. And to lose two of our captains, both Levani and Ricky, and one of the best leaders on our team, Patrick Fields -- to be without those guys was tough. And we needed the offense to cover for it, bottom line.

You can't fumble, can't lose four fumbles, particularly, in a half. Turnovers have been hurting us all year, in particular fumbles. Made it impossible today.

The drives that we did not go backwards we scored. The problem was there was only two of them.

We had an opportunity late in the game. The game was already decided. We expect more. I expect more. We need more.

Too many near misses in our passing game. Too many off the fingertips, starting first drive against USC. Too many of our best players just not quite making it. Four more today. A little bit long. A little bit high. Off the fingertips. Two drops, two definite drops.

Our best players on the offensive side need to pull us out. That's the bottom line.

As always, we'll look at what we're doing, how we're doing it. I'm ultimately accountable for everything, obviously. That's the easy part. The hard part is drilling down and getting the most out of the guys that we have.

Had a really nice stretch of three weeks playing really good football. The last two weeks have not been our best football, not even close. Still glimpses. I still say when we didn't go backwards, we didn't have penalties, we didn't miss blocks, we didn't miss throws, we didn't fumble the ball -- we looked like us, marched down the field, scored touchdowns.

Lots to cleanup. A lot to really look at. But it's not about scheme for us right now, it's about pride. And like I said I'm ultimately responsible, but we have to play better. Our best players have to play better. We've got to put them in a better position to go out there and execute.

You're missing all of your running backs. And Brendon Barrow tried to come back today, didn't really have it. Eventually I had to pull him out. We don't have the running backs. We get as much as we can out of the guys that went out there and played. But we just need more out of our best players.

And they have more to give. And gotta make it happen.

Difficult loss. It's going to be a difficult week of preparation, to go into a hostile environment. Do we have the players to win? Absolutely. Regardless of injury, we do.

We've got to go out there and execute. The plan's got to be great. The plan's got to be better than the plan we had today. We have to play better than we played today.

Q. [Question off microphone]. Ashton Daniels, can you take us through the day for those two guys, both Mitch Leigber and Ashton Daniels as you saw them?

COACH SHAW: Ashton is a true freshman. He's a heck of a player. Heck of an athlete.

Mitch is an athletic, physical, tough kid, that has some very, very unique skills. And both of them had their moments. Both of them turned the ball over. So there's the learning that has to happen on the fly. And as best we can, try to mitigate that learning process from hurting us.



But Ashton had three or four really impressive runs. Nice throw to Mitch. Come down there on the early drive, the first drive.

Mitch had some really nice runs. Had some really big pass pickups also, some blitz pickups, for a guy three weeks ago he was playing safety, for him to learn the pass protection schemes and come in, didn't make a mistake all day assignment-wise. That's impressive. That's putting a lot on a young man. And he's accepted the challenge.

And this week, anecdote, coach, our running backs room, Coach Gould, just rattled off a list of questions. And Mitch answered every single one. He was right on every single one. That says a lot about him.

He's going to get better. He's going to improve. He's going to get better. There's a lot to work with there. It's almost unfair to a certain degree to put that on his shoulders right now.

But we didn't get into this sport and we don't live our lives looking for what's fair and what's not fair. We have to respond to the situations we're presented with and be at our best. So Mitch is going to work hard. He's going to come back and learn even more this week.

I'm not sure if Brendon Barrow is going to make it back. He may pretty much need to go the distance. Shield did some single-back stuff for us, continue to get Shield Taylor ready.

And Ashton's got to do a dual role for us, do a little bit of running back, some gun-run quarterback stuff. I anticipate him playing some more pure running back. We're just going to need him to do that.

But, like I said, it's not on those guys, really, it's on our guys that are leaders on the offensive side that need to pick us up.

Q. You mentioned four defensive starters on that first drive, pardon my ignorance -- I knew Maison (phonetic) and Fields and Damuni. Who was the fourth?

COACH SHAW: Ricky, Levani, Patrick Fields and I'm losing --

Q. I think you mentioned Mangum-Farrar. Did he not play at all?

COACH SHAW: He didn't play today. We're out four guys. And Kendall Williamson was the fourth, our safety.

So today, of our 11 starters, we played with five. Like I

said, our backups have to be ready and gotta go and we've got to get them ready.

My dad's a long-time defensive coordinator. He always talked about you have to be strong up the middle and we've been much better the last month against the run. Our defensive line has come along, played well.

But a big part of it has been our inside linebackers also have played better in the last month than they played the first month of the season.

But now we're without all three of those guys that take a lot of snaps for us. And part of our stop and run last month also has been Patrick Fields. We've dropped him down in there in the briar patch, and he's made a lot of tackles, a lot of one-on-one tackles on space.

And, so, to miss all three of our inside linebackers and our strong safety, and then losing Kendall also, that's the middle of our defense. You wonder why we had issues right up the middle for a good chunk of the game.

Q. Any update on the three guys who were hurt on the first two plays and on Tremayne?

COACH SHAW: Not right now. I think Brycen was okay. He was hobbled a little bit. But he's not injured.

Q. What did you tell your team after a game like this?

COACH SHAW: I won't share everything. But I'm just appealing to their pride. There are things we can't do anything about, injuries we can't do anything about. But the things that we can do things about, that's what I'm holding them accountable for. And I hold myself accountable for.

To prepare the team to go out there and play much better than we did. And we had our opportunities. But especially on the offensive side, you can't turn the ball over twice and expect to beat a team that you're comparable to. We turned it over four times, not to mention the couple of times on third down we had (indiscernible) going after the quarterback.

There's just a lot of things we could have done better that would helped us have the opportunity. Not going to harp on the team for the things we can't control, but there are things we can control.

Q. On the four fumbles, obviously you guys work on ball security. I'm not going to ask about that. How much were those fumbles a good function of good poke-outs and how much a function of you guys not

securing it well enough?

COACH SHAW: It's all on us. It's all on us. Defensively they put their helmet on the ball. They strip at it. That's just part of playing the game. And it hurt us a little bit early in the season. But to have a receiver, tight end and two runners -- a quarterback and a running back -- all put the ball on the ground -- we actually had five; we only lost four -- not to mention the ball security in the return game.

Just lack of attention to detail. Those are things that we just do every single day. And as much as positivity sometimes is contagious, sometimes negativity is contagious. And the hard part is for guys like Ben and Elijah, they feel that pressure to make something happen and sometimes when you try to do too much, that's when you really falter.

And sometimes it's time to go down. Hold onto the ball. You're surrounded by the other team. Go down, take the positive gain, and go on to the next play. Guys are trying too hard to make something happen because of the situation we're in. That's one of the big things we have to guard against.

Q. Being that the passing game is going to be so important the last three games, do you guys plan on changing up the play calling or maybe the looks you guys are giving considering you only have about, sounds like only one and a half running backs left?

COACH SHAW: We're going to try to do whatever it takes. I don't know what you mean by changing up play calling. Like I said, the plays we didn't go backwards, the drives we didn't go backwards, we marched down the field and scored. We had explosive plays that we missed throws on or missed catches, went off our fingertips. We caught the ball and fumbled.

Like I said there's a lot of things we could do a lot about. We've got some outstanding players that are still healthy that we have to rely on and lean on to give us an opportunity to win some games.

Q. You keep talking about pride. And that's one thing you keep saying over and over. How do you pick up the team's pride going into a hostile environment next week?

COACH SHAW: By stripping away all the excuses. Don't care who is injured. Don't care about situations. Not trying to get overly complicated in the things that we do.

We've got to block. We've got to throw. We've got to catch. We've got to run.

Defensively, we've got to be in our gaps. We've got to fight to get off blocks. We've got to tackle guys, get them on the ground.

So pride is in those things that we know we can do. And we need to go out there and execute.

Q. Thoughts on Jason Thompson's performance in the return game. Had a 10-yard punt return, 151 total yards on kick return. How do you feel he's adjusted to having to step up in that department?

COACH SHAW: Yeah, he's in that category of guys that are true freshmen. If you look, we've got a lot of them out there. He had an outstanding senior year down in Southern California. He's quick. He's explosive. He's active.

Didn't anticipate him playing this year. But he's thrust into duty. And mostly positive. You saw his quickness. Saw his acceleration.

Kickoff return, honestly, is about that combination of patience and explosion. So he does a really good job of catching the ball and not running full speed and setting up the blocks and then hitting it.

The first one, he was setting up blocks, and then somebody slipped off and tackled him. Looks like he's not really running, but he's setting up those blocks. Couple times we got those blocks set up you saw his acceleration.

Really great on that punt return. He's only going to get bigger, faster, stronger as he gets older here.

At the same time, as great as his day was on the numbers side, dropped a kickoff return and caught a ball inside the 5 on a punt. So young guys sometimes make young mistakes. We've got to have them grow through those.

With our injuries that's what's going to happen. And we're going to place some guys out there that are not used to playing a lot. They've got to go out there and execute. We just have to know we're going to live through some mistakes. It's just going to happen. Got to live through some mistakes. But the guys that go out there, we've got to put ourselves in a position to win.

Q. Talk about pride amongst the players. I'm sure there's pride amongst the coaching staff. How are you guys handling this right now?

A. That's an interesting question. Not a bad question. It's an interesting question. I don't know how to answer

because we do what we need to do. That's the job. That's the profession.

If you're on a five-game win streak, hey, there's things you have to avoid. You have to avoid complacency and avoid guys thinking they've arrived.

You go through a difficult patch, you've got to find a way to get the guys going, lean on your strengths, cover up your weaknesses, get the guys active and ready to go.

You have injuries. You have to prepare the next group of guys to go out there and play.

It's a delicate balance between being understanding. I can go in there and just rip all the guys that were third and fourth string that had to play today. That serves no purpose.

Gotta correct them. Gotta have them learn from their mistakes. Gotta have them grow and be better next week than they were this week.

Our guys had some great efforts today. We've got to example those and lean on those. And just a ton of things that we either have to throw out or do better. That's what we have to do.

So I don't spend time in -- I don't wallow, I don't spend time in disappointment and loss. I don't spend time in exhilaration. We win a game, I'm the same as when we lose a game. It's a data point.

Winning and losing is what happens. And it's all about what you do next. So that's my mentality. That's the job, honestly. And that's how we've got some things turned around when we had a losing streak there and everything looked bad. But came back, played really well against Oregon State. And came back, won two games in a row. Now we've lost two games in a row.

We've got to retool, come back, find the things we're ready to do, things we can do with the guys that are healthy, and put pressure on the guys that are our best players and let them know we need you make plays. But we also have to stay in the wheelhouse to make sure that we're being reasonable with what we're asking them to do.

We've got to cut down on our mistakes and cut down on our turnovers. That's the job. How I feel about it is inconsequential because staff and I just need to be ready to do whatever it takes to get our team prepared to put ourselves in a position to win next week.

Q. This wasn't probably the scenario you imagined

getting the young guys in in this manner, but how important is it for them to be able to get these live-game reps even though it's not really like a schedule that you had, I guess?

COACH SHAW: It's not what we wanted to have. But to have Ernest Cooper, because of injury, have to get the reps he's gotten. We think Ernest is going to be special.

Teva Tafiti had a chance to get in there today. We think he's going to be really good too. Would have loved to have them redshirt and not play this year but we had to put them out there.

Jason Thompson, all the receivers and DBs talked about him all summer, as a kid coming in. Okay, this kid's going to be good one of these days, when he gets the opportunity down the road. It just happened to be these last couple of weeks.

So things that we didn't want to do, but much like my answer to Troy, we can't shy away from them. We've got young guys that have to go out there and play now. They've got to go out there and help us.

We didn't anticipate Ashton having to do this much. He's got to now. But he's a talented, explosive athlete that has some nice touch. You saw on that pass he made to Mitch, this guys is a quarterback. He's not just a runner.

A lot of young guys thrust into playing right now and that's just what the season has presented us.

Q. To follow up on Ashton part, do you think for the sake of necessity that he'll get more carries as a running back or we'll maybe see him and Tanner on the field more together?

COACH SHAW: Yeah, we'll see where Brendon Barrow is. But the combination of Ashton and also had meant to get Shield Taylor some carries today, too, but didn't work out that way. We got behind too quickly. But those guys will have to step up for us as runners.

Ashton continues to do his dual role. He'll have to play some at running back and some at our quarterback, some of those quarterback runs and throw a couple of passes out of that, too.

Everything's on the table for everybody that we have. We'll see how Brendon is. We may need to add another person to the running back room. I don't know where that's going to come from. I know it's not going to come from the linebacker room.

But we've got to retool. If we go back and there's no use in complaining about it, wallowing in it. We've got to look to see who we have Sunday evening, try and put a plan together for the week. And then get after it.

Q. I want to get your thoughts on the performance of Cameron Ward today, just what he did well and the difficulty of stopping him because he obviously had a big part in their success today. Just wanted to ask about what they did well.

COACH SHAW: He's a dual-threat quarterback. He's very athletic. He got out of trouble multiple times. For quarterbacks like him, it's not just the total yards. He had 40 yards rushing, but two of those should have been negative plays. We had him dead to rights for TFLs and he got out.

We kept some pressure on him. And he missed some throws because we had guys in his face. But he also stepped up and made some big-time throws. We know he's a very good quarterback. He's set records at Incarnate Word and has been a very good quarterback this year.

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