

CFP First Round: Ohio State vs Tennessee

Saturday, December 21, 2024

Columbus, Ohio, USA

Ohio Stadium

Ohio State Buckeyes

Coach Ryan Day

Postgame Press Conference

Ohio State - 42, Tennessee - 17

Q. I don't know any artful way to say this, but where was that performance hiding?

RYAN DAY: I'm proud of our seniors for a lot of reasons. One, for the fact that they were able to finish their last game at Ohio Stadium with a win like that. I'm also proud of the way that they responded.

I told them in the locker room that in life you're going to be -- you're defined by the way you handle adversity in life, as a person, as a man, as a dad. So to see the way that they responded in this game, you can tell from the jump that they had a look in their eye that they were going to go win this game. I thought they played that way.

A lot of football ahead of us. Great win. We'll enjoy this for 24 hours. Then it's on to Oregon.

Q. From a coaching perspective, this was like 180 from your last game. What did you guys do different? Did you just say we're going to go out and throw the ball, play loose, play aggressive?

RYAN DAY: I think it was a combination of things. I think it's a little bit of everything. I think when you go back and look at the season -- we talked about it going into the game -- we were a different team. When we lost Seth, we played that Indiana game. We got the punt return, looking back on it. We got that turnover down in the red zone. We really didn't play great on offense in the Indiana game, truth be told.

Then we went into the last game and still didn't quite know what the ramifications were from everything that was going on based on who we had up front. And there was a lot of things that played into that game. But certainly one of them was we called this game more aggressively. There's no question about that.



PLAYOFF FIRST ROUND

But also I think we did some things in this game that maximized what we have in terms of our strengths and minimized our deficiencies -- not that everything was perfect in this game; it wasn't. But I do think that -- and I also thought Will was excellent in this game. Played really well. Did a really good job of placing the ball in some big-time throws. When he needed to make plays with his legs, he did.

And certainly Jeremiah was dynamite again. But Will was a leader.

But we also had balance in this game. It wasn't like we were throwing it all over the place. We did have balance. We had some good runs, and those hit for us, which makes a big difference when you have that run/pass balance that we're looking for.

This has got to build momentum going into this next game.

Q. You dominated the first half but then you looked up at the scoreboard heading into halftime and you were only up 11. Did you feel like you let them off the hook a little bit? And what was the conversation at halftime knowing that you dominated the half, albeit just an 11-point margin?

RYAN DAY: Yeah, that's why we knew coming out in the second half we had to win the next four to five minutes, and we did. That really helped, because you're right; you can feel that a little bit.

I say it to them all the time coming into halftime you're going to be up/down or it's going to be tied. So, now we have to go win the next four, five minutes of the game. They deferred, so they got the ball. We had to get that stop. We did. And we went down and scored, and that made a huge difference.

But I tell the guys all the time that in games like this, you've got to have poise because there's ups and downs, and you can't get caught up in that. But, yeah, there was a point there where we have a chance to go up 28-0, and we throw the interception. Great play, and I liked the call.



I liked how aggressive we were because that's part of it. When you're going to call the game aggressively and something like this happens, you have to be able to live with it.

But, yeah, we had a chance to score there and go 28-nothing, and the game is pretty much in hand at that point.

But they fought their way back in. They're a good team. This is a very good SEC team that came up here. So we knew it wasn't going to be easy.

Q. I know obviously the confidence from this group comes from the work you put in on a daily basis. But when you sit for weeks and you obviously just want to get into the game, how important is it for you to have that first drive the way you guys did that to build confidence for the rest of the game?

RYAN DAY: And just the execution. We've talked about that the last few weeks in some of the press conferences we've been in. I know you've heard us harp on execution, execution, execution, because there's a lot of things coming out of that last game that we just look back on and we just didn't execute very well.

And certainly there are things that we needed to do better in terms of scheme. But we also didn't execute. I thought we for the most part fielded the kicks better in this game. I thought we blocked better in this game. I thought we ran through contact better in this game. And certainly we threw and caught better in this game. And that made a huge difference in it.

You're right, there was a confidence coming out of that first quarter because we were playing with a lot of energy.

But even coming out of warmups you could feel it. These guys wanted to play in this game and there was a confidence that got built through practice. And I thought we had a good game plan going in. I think the guys believed in it. And that went a long way to get that first drive.

Q. (Indiscernible) how you got through it and just how important this was, because this was a season-defining win to this point? What did you do to make sure that you guys were ready because that was obviously a devastating loss?

RYAN DAY: The first week was an identification of the issues. You don't just move on from the game. You have to identify what the issues are and have real conversations with the players, allow them to speak because they're

vested in this. And then coaches have their two cents.

You give it about a week and then you put a plan together on how we're going to move forward, how we're going to get these things fixed.

And you find out who your opponent is. We found out it's Tennessee. That's where the two weeks of work went.

About Wednesday of this week you could tell these guys just wanted to get on the field. It had been a long leadup for us, weeks. To say it doesn't weigh on you, it does. We have a lot of pride in who we are. These guys have a lot of pride.

These guys, they love each other and they're a great representation of Ohio State. And I'm glad that they were able to -- for the last game, for those seniors -- to finish with a win, but they are not satisfied at all. I mean, they quickly are going to get their focus on Oregon, which is going to be a rematch for us, which is exciting, and going into a great opportunity to go play in the Rose Bowl again.

So I think it says a lot about who our guys are that we're able to respond like that in a big way.

Q. You talk a lot about leave no doubt. How important was it for you guys in terms of building momentum to not just win tonight but to leave no doubt?

RYAN DAY: That's it. And even there were a couple of points in the game, there's a couple of calls and different things where in the past, when you have one of these games and it comes down to the last play, you can look to those as game-altering plays.

But when you leave no doubt, nobody will talk about those plays because we did. And there was a few opportunities in this game to do that very thing -- fourth down stop. There was, again, those drives right there in the third quarter that I felt like allowed us an opportunity to pull away when the defense was getting stops.

Q. You told us during the week that we could see a rotation on the interior of your offensive line there. Could you just talk about the job Luke Montgomery did. But also Austin is playing essentially two different positions in one game. Just evaluate the job he did going back and forth depending who was in the game with him?

RYAN DAY: When you don't notice the guards, they're doing pretty well. I noticed Luke's energy, toughness and edge. I've got to watch the film and see how he did, but we blocked them much better in this game. And they have a

good front.

I thought we got some of the gap schemes going. Some good double teams. It wasn't all perfect by any means, and we'll have to continue to diversify going into next game. But I thought we at least focused on the things that these guys could do well and now we have to build on it.

And they play with confidence and energy. You could see after we scored a couple of touchdowns, they were jacked up, and coming off the field with good energy.

And the leaders of that group is certainly Donovan Jackson and Josh Fryar. And good to see Carson play well, looked like it anyways from my point of view, watching the game on tablet that he played well. That allows us to have balance, and as you know that's a huge part of it.

Q. (Off microphone).

RYAN DAY: We'll have to look at it, but it seems healthy to me to get those guys involved in the game.

Q. This week, the defense talked about if they had to win the game, they felt confident doing that. Obviously your offense plays the way it does so they don't have that as much on their shoulders, but other than a couple of drives they hold the fort down. Their performance and what they can build on from this.

RYAN DAY: They're playing with confidence. And coming off the last game, I think they felt like, you know, we have to go win the game, but when the offense is playing to their potential, like they were today, now it's complementary and you can end up with a game like we did tonight.

So you just never know. It could be like the Oregon game. It could be like the last game of the season. You just never know how those games are going to shake out. And we have to do whatever we can to win. We've talked about that before. Just win the game. And so we've got to win three more.

Q. With Will, that first touchdown throw just seemed like it was so on point. He looked to be just kind of dealing tonight. Did you see anything different from him the last couple of weeks? Just because down field he looked better. He looked more concise almost at every turn.

RYAN DAY: I thought his footwork was good. We worked hard on some of those throws, and he hit a few of those right on the money. The fade ball and go ball were really well done. The levels ball, too, and Carnell was really a well thrown ball. Probably missing a few others. But he

was accurate today.

A big thing for Will is his footwork. When his footwork's on point, and when he's seeing things well, he's as good as anybody in the country.

Q. I wanted to ask you big picture about the Big Ten and what kind of the season maybe looks like when you have three teams advancing to the quarterfinals. And from a big picture perspective what was this first year like playing in the Big Ten? And how good are these teams that are in the tournament?

RYAN DAY: Well, I think the Big Ten has great football. I think that we play nine conference games. So we beat each other up sometimes. But when you have an opportunity like this against a very good SEC team, we know how important that is for the conference.

And great to see some of the other teams in the league representing well because it is a great conference and a very difficult conference.

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