



BENGALS POSTGAME QUOTES

SEPT. 11, 2022

PITTSBURGH AT CINCINNATI

ZAC TAYLOR

Head coach

Initial comments ...

We had our chances. To lose the turnover battle five to nothing, to have kick operations ruined on two kicks that both would have won the game is disheartening in that way because I thought we would have handled those situations better. But I thought our guys really fought back and gave us a chance. I thought the defense played solid all day. We would have liked to get a turnover, but really they held them to 13 points until that last field goal. That's a pretty good day's work in the NFL. So, just didn't do enough as a team to overcome some of the adversity that we put ourselves in, didn't find a way to make a play at the end that would have won it, and that's life. We've got 16 more of these, and we'll turn around next week and start getting ready for Dallas and try to gain some momentum that way."

Were there any thoughts about going for the two-point conversion at the end of regulation?

"You have to trust that we're going to get it done. At the end of the day, that part of the operation was good enough."

Why didn't you choose to run the play clock down on the punt in overtime?

"New operation. We snapped there with 13 seconds, I understand that, trust me, we'd rather do something different. But just trying to make sure the operation ran smoothly, it turned out that we sacrificed some seconds just to make sure that we were all on the same page there."

What's the trade-off to that decision?

"It would be 13 seconds."

What goes into making sure the field goal operation runs well?

"That the communication's good, everyone's on the same page, everyone gets on the snap at the same point. You saw earlier that they rushed us on some looks earlier in the game, so we just wanted to make sure everything runs smooth."

How often does Mitchell Wilcox practice long snapping?

"He practices all the time."

What led to Joe Burrow throwing three interceptions?

"You saw some of them. [T.J. Watt] jumps up and intercepts one. They made some really good plays. We'll review them all and make sure that, if we can make improvements at whatever position, we'll make them. I thought that they made some really good plays on the ball as well. You got to give credit to the Pittsburgh Steelers. They showed up ready to play, they made some plays on some balls that were really great plays."

On the last third down, did you give Joe Burrow creative freedom knowing that a long field goal wasn't the best option?

"We talked through that. We wanted to still be aggressive and score. There's a fine line there. We ran some plays that the coverages didn't give us the opportunities. We still wanted to have that aggressive mindset, knowing that the field goal operation wasn't ideal. That's just the way it played out for us."

Did Joe Burrow's appendectomy have anything to do with his struggles?

"No, I don't think it had anything to do with it."

Your offense ran close to 100 plays. Does the resulting exhaustion factor into your play calling?

"It's both: them and us. At the same time, we're watching them trying to see where there are some yards to be gained because of how many snaps have been out there on the field. Sure, it affected us at times, too. You have receivers in and out. When you lose Tee Higgins early in the game, that hurts as well, so then you're shuffling some guys around. I thought our guys handled it really well. We got yards there at the end; we just couldn't finish those drives that would have won the game for us."

Why didn't you challenge the play where Ja'Marr Chase came within one yard of a touchdown?

"Part of it was that that's the hardest place for us to see in the entire field is that spot. I didn't think there was a chance there was a touchdown there initially. So, we got on the ball to run it in quickly. It's hard with all the craziness in that moment, all the communication to get that 'Stop, stop. Let's evaluate this.' We just couldn't get it done fast enough by the time we'd seen a replay and realized 'Oh shoot, he might have gotten in there.' We've just got to learn from those. It's a fine line — when you get the ball on the inch, you just want to punch it in real quick. In hindsight, maybe he was in and we could have given ourselves a chance."

How often do you prepare for losing your long snapper and the subsequent decision-making?

"That doesn't come up very often. I'm not going to lie to you. That's one (where) you're adjusting on the fly there. We felt the right decision was to kick it on third down in case the snap was off and Kevin Huber could just spike it and we could try to kick it again. Unfortunately, it just didn't work out for us."

When did Clark Harris get hurt?

"I think it was on a punt. That seemed like a really long game, I don't remember the exact situation that came up."

Was there any thought to having Ted Karras long snap?

"[Mitchell Wilcox] has been the guy that's been practicing for us, so he's been the best option right now."

How concerned were you with how the offense started?

"We just had turnovers. We moved the ball. When you're in the red zone and we just had the turnovers, it's just a matter of 'Okay, let's go back and make sure we're on the same page and doing the right things.' I thought that we made some really good plays. I thought we ran the ball really well and put ourselves in some good positions. I thought the pass game was efficient aside from the turnovers. I thought we had opportunities for guys to win and make plays, and they did. Particularly there in the second half, I felt like we were really moving the ball quite a bit, we just weren't capitalizing. We had a no-score down in the low red zone, we had a no-score in overtime. So, you're going to say 'offensive struggles' — really the game should have been over on both of those, on an extra point and field goal. It just didn't work out for us this week."

On the field goal attempt in overtime, was the plan for Kevin Huber to end the play if the snap was high?

"It's really if he doesn't think he can get (the snap) down. I assume that he thought he could get it down, so he got it down and we gave ourselves a shot there. If the ball dribbles back or it's an errant snap, then you get a chance to get to the next play."

On the play when Samaje Perine picked up the fumble and then you snapped with 13 seconds on the play clock, was that to not put too much pressure on Mitchell Wilcox?

"That's what we were talking about. Yeah, that part was a fine line of wanting to milk (the clock). There's 13 seconds left when we snapped it — that's not ideal, obviously. The way this game played out, we wanted to do it a little bit later. But again, it's a new operation, new people in there and the communication just wasn't exactly what we wanted."

How severe is Tee Higgins' concussion?

"It's hard. It's a concussion. I talked to him at halftime, and of course he wanted to go in, but that's not the way we can do it."

What was your message to Joe Burrow about some of his throws into tight windows?

"Keep being aggressive. That's what's got us in the positions that we've been in. It's a really good defense, they did a good job. They were locked in. They've played us as much as anybody. They got some talented playmakers that made some really good plays, squeezing some of those routes. We made some adjustments as we went to try to put us in better positions. I wanted Joe to continue to be aggressive."

Did you anticipate the timing and communication problems on offense?

"We do everything we can to iron that out. Again, the turnovers are what got us early. I don't know that we punted in the first half — I could be mistaken there. At one point, we had five possessions, four turnovers, and one field goal. It felt like we were doing well to make some room there in the run and the pass game. They just kept taking the ball away from us."

What's the immediate plan at long snapper?

"We've got one on the practice squad that we like, so that would be the immediate plan there."

What's the biggest challenge with making sure the team is ready to go next week?

"It's not the way we wanted to start the season. But we're smart enough to know not to react. When you lose the turnover battle five to nothing, I don't expect to win many games. We almost did. So you've got to find the silver lining there. There's a lot of things we can continue to work on. We've got to take the ball off the other team, we've got to sack the quarterback more, we've got to protect our quarterback, we've got to have better ball security. I've got a lot of confidence that we will. I think at the end of the day, people are going to see Pittsburgh as being a really, really, really good defense. We knew that coming in with some of the guys they'd gotten back, some of the guys they added, some of the ways they were able to play their guys. We knew what we were getting into before the game, and we knew this would be a big challenge for us."

Was it an easy decision to punt at the end of overtime?

"There's confusion there obviously of what the situation is. It's not fourth down, so initially you think you can advance the ball. Then you realize it's inside two minutes so you can't advance the ball. So then you try to recalibrate — where's the ball? We want to win the game but you have to punt because it's fourth and too long. Obviously, it's too long of a field goal at that point. There was some communication that we had to iron out there and ultimately we had to punt the ball."

JOE BURROW

Quarterback

Can you give us a breakdown on the four interceptions?

"I'll just have to watch the film and see."

How frustrating was it to start the first half that way?

"It's frustrating, but I had faith that we'd come back. I'm proud of the way we played in the second half. We came back strong and put ourselves in position to win the game."

Did you feel there were more mistakes on your end or it's the way their defense played to create those turnovers?

"You've got to give them credit. They had a good plan and showed some new things. We'll watch the film and readjust."

What was it they were doing that allowed them to create the turnovers today?

"They made good plays. Obviously I'd like to have some of those back, and they made some good plays on some of them."

Do you think having some rust from not playing until today played a role in the first half?

"You don't make any excuses; it is what it is. The first half didn't go our way, the second half I thought we played well."

What was the difference between the first and second half?

"Completing balls."

Knowing what was going on with the long snapper situation, did you want to keep the ball and have it in your hands?

"That's not my decision. I execute as well as I can and what happens, happens. Obviously it didn't go our way."

Talk about the touchdown to Ja'Marr Chase and the plays that led up to it.

"Yeah, it was a roller coaster. They were doubling him down there, but we thought we could fit that in and executed it well."

Did it feel a lot like the Green Bay game last year?

“Definitely up and down — roller coaster game, that’s for sure.”

Did you feel time missed in training camp had anything to do with today?

“No, I don’t think so.”

You were really hard on yourself in the Tennessee playoff game for taking a sack and taking yourself out of field goal range. It happened a couple times today. Was that a matter of just aligning your footing and getting back and shaking off the rust?

“We’ll have to watch the film and see. It’s tough to recall those plays right now.”

How much did the offensive line having not time to play together in game before have an effect on the communication today?

“Any time you have new guys up front, it’s going to take a while to get the communication right up front, and I thought they did a good job.”

The Bengals defense played well today. How does that affect your mindset and does it make you more aggressive?

“Our defense played great. We’ve got to give them credit and we’ve just got to get it right on offense.”

Was there anything specific the Steelers were doing defensively, taking things away?

“They were playing a lot of two-high coverage, just like we expect to happen all year.”

Hayden Hurst had some pretty good catches today. How clutch was he with Tee Higgins and Tyler Boyd out?

“Like I said, we’ll have to watch the film but first glance, I think he played really well and came up big for us.”

You talked about the roller coaster effect. How difficult was it for you to slow things down, take deep breaths and focus on moving the ball down field?

“I thought we did a good job of that. When things weren’t going well we didn’t overreact and when things were going well, we didn’t overreact as well. I thought we stayed even keeled. Obviously, we would have liked to have come out with a win.”

Do you think this will be a trait for the team going forward after a loss like today?

“Yeah, it’s how we’ve been the last two years — the last three years really — to always be in every game.”

On the play right before the punt with the fumble in overtime, Zac Taylor said there was some confusion about advancing the ball. Did you know that rule?

“I knew that rule. It is what it is. It’s a rule.”

This was the first time you had four interceptions in a game. When you’re going through that, what’s going through your mind?

“Obviously you don’t want to throw four picks, but I never panicked. We stayed even keeled and we came back and put ourselves in position to win.”

On the first interception, was there something they did to force that?

“Yeah, he made a really good play. You can tell they had a plan for that.”

You’ve had success against the Steelers coming into the game today. Does a loss like this sting a little more because it’s them?

“A loss is a loss no matter who it is. Obviously, a division opponent and you’d like to come out with that one but it didn’t happen.”

How many times did you practice the two-point conversion to Mike Thomas?

“I haven’t thrown that one to Mike at all. He came up big on that play.”

On the touchdown to Ja’Marr Chase to tie it, you guys were obviously gassed. You’d run so many plays and were all crouched down on the sideline. Did you guys talk about how tired you were at that point, or what was that conversation like between you guys?”

“Everyone’s tired, but I thought we came back in overtime, played well and put ourselves in position.”

Did you think Ja’Marr Chase was in at the end of regulation?

“Yeah, there were a couple that were close. Obviously the booth has a better view than I do, so it is what it is.”

Was there any talk of going for the two-point conversion after the tying touchdown?

“No. You want to kick the extra point there.”

EVAN McPHERSON

Kicker

It had to be a tough situation when Clark Harris goes down with a bicep injury and you have to work with a new long snapper, no?

“You always hate when a teammate goes down, especially when it’s a valuable member of your team like Clark. But honestly, I had full trust in [Mitchell] Wilcox. There was no reason to miss anything. I put everything on me. I’ll grow from it, learn from it and move on.”

Is this a case where you don’t realize how much you’re missing a component of the operation until it’s unavailable, especially with disruption of timing?

“Like I said, I have full trust in Mitch. At the end of the day, I just couldn’t get it done. Twenty-nine yards is 29 yards. I can hit that with my left foot, so there’s really no excuse for me to not make that one.”

How tough is it to know people will look at the stat sheet and say ‘They missed this and they missed that’ without knowing the full circumstances behind it?

“No, I don’t think it’s going to bother me at all because what I’ve learned this year is football, at the end of the day, it doesn’t define

me. If I go out there and I miss two kicks, one kick, it doesn't really matter. At the end of the day, we're going to move on to the next game and this game, it doesn't matter now so those two kicks don't define me. (They're) not who I am, so we're just going to move on and keep working."

You did hit a 59-yard attempt earlier in the game setting a franchise record, so this game had to be a roller coaster emotionally, no?

"That field goal was great to start the year and hopefully that's something we can build off of and keep getting better."

TYLER BOYD
Wide receiver

What are your thoughts on the Steelers' performance today?

"They're a divisional team, they always play hard and they made more plays than us."

Is a loss like this harder than a blowout because you're going down to sudden death?

"No. Either way, it still hurts. A loss is a loss (and) it all hurts the same. We had an opportunity and didn't pull it off."

What are the next steps for the team?

"Come back tomorrow, watch film, correct things and see what we can do better. We've got to prepare for the Cowboys."

What was the difference for the offense in the third quarter versus the first half where you were able to start finding some success?

"We started getting it together after the first half. We were moving the ball and making plays when we needed to. It was a tough game and we had an opportunity to win it."

MITCHELL WILCOX
Tight end

Can you talk about your long-snapping attempts today after being called into service once Clark Harris went down with his injury?

"We had a chance on the first one — it just got blocked. On the second one, it's on me. I've got to give Kevin [Huber] a better snap there. That's on me."

Do you line up as a blocker usually on the placement kicks and if so, where?

"I'm usually on the left wing."

On the punt, are you the one who triggers the snap or is it personal protector?

"The personal protector."

Were you concerned at all about running it as you snapped it with 13 seconds left on the play clock instead of taking it down to one or two seconds remaining?

"We were in a bleeding-the-clock situation. We want to have a little bit of a buffer there to make sure the operation has enough time to check for any protections."

What is your experience long snapping?

"I did it in high school and I always was the backup in college, but I was on the shield so I was never called to do it in college. I had a little bit more experience with the long snapping on punts, but it would have been good to get some reps at placekicking snaps."

What was the last time you really worked on it?

"(I've done so) periodically."

JA'MARR CHASE
Wide receiver

What adjustments did the Bengals make to attack the Steelers defense and how did the game unfold in your view?

"They just did a lot of two-high (coverage) and really, we just tried to move everybody around, use short routes and get everybody underneath, and we didn't hit too many whole shots today. We tried to go in the middle of the field to attack the safeties."

Can you talk about the one-handed catch you made that didn't count?

"It was a bench route and Joe [Burrow] threw me the ball. I knew I was going to get it on that play and I just have to make the catch."

You guys put yourself in a tough spot with five turnovers and still had the opportunity more than once to win the game down the stretch. What does that say about this team?

"We don't give up. We kept pushing even though we had mental errors. Overall, we did a good job fighting and we've got to do the same thing again next week."

Losing Tee Higgins, how big of a deal was that for the offense?

"He's a big piece to the offense. We definitely need Tee out there with us. When he went down, we just had to keep going. It's next-man-up at that point. We gave him all our condolences and made sure he's okay. Even at halftime, we came in and talked to him, so we were making sure he was okay."

How long will it take to get over this loss and get back to work to get ready for the Dallas Cowboys?

"We've got to watch the film, make corrections and then we're moving on. Next week, we've got Dallas and we've got to get our minds ready quickly."



STEELERS POSTGAME QUOTES

SEPT. 11, 2022

PITTSBURGH AT CINCINNATI

MIKE TOMLIN

Head coach

Initial comments ...

"I'm not surprised by the fight. I knew they would fight. I found comfort in that. I wasn't looking for comfort, but I found comfort in that I just saw enough of that during team development. Obviously, it was a hard-fought game on both sides, and it always is when you're in the AFC North. It's good to come down here and get it done today. We'll learn from these lessons and get ready for the next AFC game. Again, just appreciative of the efforts with weapons without costs. T.J. Watt is being evaluated for an upper body injury. Naj (Najee Harris) is being evaluated for a foot injury. Levi Wallace has an ankle injury. (Robert) Spillane has an eye injury. It's good to come in here, in a hostile environment and not blink, particularly the number of new guys — whether they were rookies or new to us. I just gave all the new guys game balls. The guys that have been here before, there is a certain expectation. They know what the standard of expectation is, but I can't say enough about the new guys and how they came alongside us and fought as if they've been here. And that is just so critical in environments like this."

Is this one of the wildest finishes you can remember?

"Man, we've had a bunch of them up here. Remember Vontaze Burfict picked the ball off and ran out of the tunnel with it. This is AFC North football."

What are the traits you see in this group that allows it to fight like this?

"The spirit. We put them in adverse circumstances — in team development so that is revealed. I don't think any of us are surprised by it because we've seen enough of it in team development."

What message did you want to send the team by gifting them black air forces?

"That's a little light-hearted fun among us. I'm not going to add any color to it for you guys. That's our business as far as I'm concerned."

How would you characterize the play of your offense?

"It was enough. We are 1-0, just like special teams and defense. We win together, we lose together. I'll comb through it from an analysis standpoint on Tuesdays like I always do."

How would you evaluate the job Mitch Trubisky did in his first start for the Steelers?

"He did not blink. (He) made the necessary plays in the waning moments. I'm appreciative of his efforts."

On the team's five takeaways on defense ...

"Man, when you're playing Joe Burrow and company, you better get the ball somehow. They are not punting a lot. That's just the function of how some of these high-powered offenses and top-notch quarterbacks are. Thursday night, I'm watching (Bills vs Rams), I don't know if (Josh) Allen punted. That's just the nature of today's game, so you better be prepared to take the ball away. That's why, culturally, we stress some of the things we stress in terms of taking the ball away."

How aware are you of their snapper issues and how does that affect you?

"I was (aware). I don't know that it affected how we managed it. It was more something for them to deal with than us."

Was that a usual block from Minkah Fitzpatrick, or was that something different you guys did based on the long snapper?

"It was op (operation) time. The ball didn't get there. I'm not going to make more out of it than what it is."

Minkah Fitzpatrick isn't officially named as captain, but how does he lead with some of the things he did out there today?

"That's just when you got a good team. You got guys that are deserving of that recognition, but you can't trot eight guys out there. Everybody respects that dude (Fitzpatrick) in terms of his talents and work ethic but his leadership, so I don't think anyone views him as uncaptain like."

Did you see splash plays from your defense?

"And furthermore, I said we need them to be what we need them to be. We needed five (turnovers) today. That's what great defenses do. You guys ask me to define great defenses? It's a loose definition. They smile in the face of adversity, and they deliver necessary plays, and that's why I answered it a couple days ago the way I did. Today's an example of that."

What is one lesson you can take away from this game?

"If you got ground to defend, defend it. If you got bullets in the gun on offense, you fire them. It's going to be a lot to be downtrodden about it in the game of football from an ebb and flow perspective. More than anything at the early stages of the season, when you have new guys, you just want to know that they're in their game — that they don't shrink in the moments. And so that was really good to be in some of the moments and see some of the things that we saw."

What does it say about the new guys that they were able to weather the storm in a game with as a big as magnitude as this one?

"They are getting on board. They are keeping the company beat and I'm appreciative of that."

MITCH TRUBISKY

Quarterback

What did you see on the final completion to Pat Freiermuth?

"I thought the right end jumped offside and I tried to scramble around and make a play. I didn't see the flag on the ground, but I had a good idea it would be a free play. I found Pat in the middle, and he made a heck of a play not quitting on it. It was a heads-up play by everyone."

Have you ever been a part of a game that wild?

"No, that was pretty crazy. The back-and-forth nature — we found out a lot about this team. We battled, we stuck together. We have a lot to clean up, but we found a way in the end. Winning is fun."

What did you learn about yourself today?

"We battled. We made the plays when we needed to. The defense absolutely balled today with those turnovers. We just have to go back to the drawing board and do our part. We win and lose as a team together and today we found a way to win."

What do you need to do to sustain more drives?

"We need to be better on third downs, getting the run game going a bit more. We have to connect more with receivers on deep to intermediate routes. We'll go back to the film and look at it, specifically third downs. We also have to turn turnovers into touchdowns and not settle for touchdowns. There's a lot to get better on and correct but it always feels better to do that after a win."

What was the conversation when you got the ball on the final drive?

"We were playing to win. We had another chance and we wanted to make the most of it. We wanted to be smart and take care of the football but also try to win. We didn't want it to end in a tie but I wasn't thinking about it. It all started with that big chunk play to Pat on the scramble, and special teams did a great job finishing it off."

What does getting the game ball mean to you?

"It was cool. He gave it to all the guys new to the team. It was a really cool gesture, especially for the young guys. There's going to be a lot of crazy games like that, so it's important we stay together."

Did you think you'd get the ball back at the end?

"I was grateful for that. There were a lot of missed opportunities. When you take care of that last one and put your team in a position to win, it feels good. There's definitely a lot to get better from, though."

Was part of the game plan neutralizing their edge rushers?

"I think we did a good job at that. Only one sack, so we protected the football. We have a lot of respect for both of their ends. They're really good players and we didn't want them to wreak havoc and generate big plays. We have to find ways to be more aggressive offensively and stay on the field. We can get better in every aspect of the game, but we did execute that part of the game plan."

How do you evaluate your offensive line?

"They gave me time back there. I was getting the ball out, moving in the pocket. We took a step forward, and they did a great job. We have to continue to get better, look at the film and be critical of ourselves, but enjoy the win. The way we stuck together and battled — that will help us in the direction we want to go to."

How would you evaluate the totality of your performance today?

"It can be a lot better. I need to find more completions, connect down the field and get the ball out. I can be smarter with how I use my legs and pick up more yards. It has to be better on third downs for sure. That's the money down for the quarterback, and you have to stay on the field. It gives the defense a break. We need to find more ways to score points, and I can do better in that aspect."

How does it feel to get your first start in Pittsburgh and win?

"It means a lot. You always want to get the first one, being new to the team. Being back as the starter, it means a lot. It was crazy, but at the end of the day, we found a way. That's all that matters, is the win."

CAMERON SUTTON

Cornerback

Did the defense have a chip on their shoulder going into this one?

"I think so. Just going into the year — high energy, flying around, the love for this game, the love for our brothers. We've just been waiting to show it. So week-in and week-out, we've been preparing well. We played for each other and kept our best foot forward. That's a great start for us, but it's not the end — it's just the start."

It seemed like Minkah Fitzpatrick's interception really set the tone, especially for the defense ...

"Yeah, again, just speaking of resilience, and making plays on the ball. That's something we prep ourselves for, and it's just part of our game — finding the ball in the air, making plays, being opportunistic, and create havoc and score for ourselves — not just putting it all on the offense or special teams. Obviously, we created those turnovers to get us in good position, or get it in the end zone. We were able to do that here, and it gave us a lot of energy throughout the course of the game, and we just finished well."

You guys were plus-five in the turnovers, and usually a team would run away with that, but it's the NFL and anything can happen ...

"Yeah for sure. You want to control what you can control — that's the ebb and flow of the game. Good things like that happen, you get turnovers to get the ball back in good position — that's just the battle of the game. We just did a great job in getting off the field in situations we needed to. I'm not sure what we were on third down, but that was a big thing for us too. We did a good job getting off the field and creating turnovers, and we're just looking to carry that over."

Can a win like this give you momentum or is it over after this game?

"There's a lot to from this game. It's the first one of 17, so it's a long road ahead of us. We will use that momentum going into next week, but we've got to bring that energy for ourselves each and every day."

Pat Freiermuth

Tight end

Any word from Najee Harris? Obviously, Jaylen Warren had to go in there and finish it up. Did you hear from Naj and how

he's doing?

"No, that's higher than my pay grade."

What's it like to experience a game like that when it seems like it's over about five different times?

"It's AFC North football, and it's crazy wild. Obviously, there were some up and downs, but we've just got to do it again and stay locked in."

You had one last chance at the end, and you knew it was ending, but what was going through your mind on that last play?

"I knew it was Cover Zero, and I knew I was going to have inside leverage. Mitch threw a hell of a ball, I made the play, and then the ball went through."

Can you touch on the whirlwind of emotions overall?

"It was crazy. You think you're going to win the game, then you think you're going to lose the game. And that happened like three or four times. We've just got to stay consistent — not have as many ups and downs — and just keep it moving."

How close is this offense right now? You were plus-five in the turnovers, but you guys just squeaked out a win ...

"Yeah, we're there. I think it's a couple reads, a couple blocking assignments — it's always just one guy — so we've just got to make sure we stay together, and hopefully get everyone on the same page and go from there."

Is this one of the loudest games you've ever been a part of? It was like a roller coaster of emotions at the end there ...

"Later in the game, yeah absolutely. Our defense kept them quiet early on, but later in the game it was pretty loud."

ALEX HIGHSMITH

Linebacker

Can you describe what you were feeling as you lined up for that last kick?

"Man, a guy like Money Boz, he ain't going to miss twice. He's Money Boz for a reason, and we all knew that second one was going to go in."

How important was it for you all to get off to a fast start and play with an edge today?

"It was so important. The past few times we came in here we did not, and the scoreboard reflected that. Today we got off to a fast start, and we got the W. I hope it's not just this game and every game that we get off to a fast start. It was awesome to get out there together for the first time today. That was the plan — to have a four-man rush — and we knew the guys in the back would be able to handle that."

With how much you guys were on the field, and how long the game went, did you guys have to dig deep just to keep going?

"Yeah, for sure, but I think it shows the resiliency of our team. The coaches did a great job of getting us in shape over the last four weeks during camp for these moments, and it showed today, because the game was really long today."

With an efficient offense like the Bengals, how did you jam them up and survive?

"Just keep the intensity. That's all that matters. Being a rusher, you can never let down. It's something you've always got to bring, and the moment you let off the gas, and they can gas you. We just have to keep our foot on the pedal, and I think we did that today, and we just have to do the same thing every single game."

AHKELLO WITHERSPOON

Cornerback

You guys were plus-five in the turnovers, and usually teams run away with something like that, but it's the NFL and you never know what can happen ...

"Absolutely, we just have to win on one side of the ball, and we're just doing our best to support the offense. They come out, and we're in a tight game, and it's just one of those days where it's going to come down to a kick."

You guys had five takeaways today. You always want takeaways, but did you guys have more of an aggressive mindset today?

"I think it's just been a focus of ours all camp, just getting our hands on the football. That's one of the biggest predictors of a victory at this level, and I think we've just had that mentality for so long, and it was nice to put it on tape."

Coach Tomlin gave you all black Air Force Ones before the game. He said it was just a fun, light-hearted thing, but what message does that send to you guys?

"We're just coming in with an opportunity to take something back with us, and that's a win. And I think we did a good job of showing that toughness spirit, and we're excited to take the win back on the plane with us."

Did that set a tone when those were all there in the locker room?

"Absolutely, I think the tone has been set. That's the icing on the cake, but the tone has been set though."

CHASE CLAYPOOL

Wide receiver

You guys didn't have a lot of first downs, and didn't convert a lot of third downs, so how did you get it done today?

"That's just something we've got to go back to the drawing board with, but at the end of the day, the defense did their job, and we tried to help them out as much as we could. Sometimes that's just how it works out."

How was it getting down there with a couple shots to win the game?

"Oh it was awesome, we had a free play, and throwing it up to Pat (Freiermuth), and giving him a chance, and putting us in position. Hats off to Pat, because he really gave us that opportunity."

You mentioned the defense, what's it like when you see your guys play like they did against a team like the Bengals?

"Oh it was awesome. We forced five turnovers, and we didn't give the ball up. So that was awesome, and it was the difference. We need to capitalize more, but something to build from for sure."

You guys were plus-five in the turnover battle, and you squeaked one out. How close do you think this offense is?

“Yeah, I think that just shows how good of a team the Bengals are. The fact that they kept that one close after all those turnovers, I mean hats off to the Bengals, because that game should’ve been a blow out, but they kept it close and made it really hard for us to win.”