



BENGALS POSTGAME QUOTES

DEC. 16, 2023

MINNESOTA AT CINCINNATI

ZAC TAYLOR

Head coach

What are your overall thoughts on the game today?

"It took everybody — players, coaches (and the) crowd. It took everybody, and we found a way to regain the momentum in the fourth quarter. That was as hard-fought a game as I've ever had at home, but our guys found a way at the end, and you just couldn't help but think about on the fourth-and-one where the ball was at — that was the same situation we were in against them a couple of years ago. (The defense) created a turnover — we got a turnover on downs — and the offense found a way to hit a big play and keep it moving. Evan (McPherson), just like he did in his first career game-winner against the Minnesota Vikings (in 2021), found a way to do it again.

"I just couldn't be more proud of everybody involved in this whole thing. (For) anyone that represents the Bengals, this is a good day."

Do you anticipate Ja'Marr Chase and D.J. Reader being able to finish the season after going out of today's game with injuries?

"D.J., I don't think D.J. ... I have more information, but I don't think it's a positive (outcome). I'm not sure about Ja'Marr."

What more information do you have about D.J.?

"I don't want to ... it's not great. I don't want to be definitive (yet right now)."

How appropriate is it with D.J. out of the game, the one spot the Vikings run the ball to on a critical down is where he would have been and other Bengals players step up to create a stop?

"It took everybody. I'm really proud of how our defense played the whole game and got us some big stops. In the first half, they kept us in (the game) to be quite frank, because we didn't have much momentum on offense outside of that first drive. They got those two takeaways in the red zone, and so that game, really — it could have been up or down.

"It could have been similar to the Tennessee game in Week 4 when they got the ball to start the second half and then scored a bunch of points. This time, our defense just bowed up, and the offense was able to find some momentum in the second half. Again, it was a collective effort in all three phases."

What changed in the fourth quarter that got the offense going?

"I really think it was the whole second half. It felt good — we had a turnover on the first drive. I don't know if — did we score on every drive since then? — I could be wrong on that ... but it felt like we were finally able to get some first downs and get some momentum. In the first half, we had a holding penalty that put us in a second-and-long, and it's tough to overcome that against those guys. They're a hell of a team, and they make it really hard for you. They put us in some tough spots, and we were able to overcome them."

What makes Jake Browning able to deliver in such big moments?

"Jake's just so steady, you know? He really is. He doesn't get rattled by a negative play. He doesn't overreact to it. The interception is just a great example. In his fourth-ever career start, he throws a pick — I think it was cover two and the cornerback just played games with him to try and bait him to throw it over the top — and the next play, he came right back the next drive and throws a touchdown. That's what you want to see from your quarterback — a guy who doesn't get too high or too low. He's able to move on, and that's exactly what he did.

"Trust me, the protection plan, (our offensive coordinator) Brian Callahan does an excellent job. Those guys buy into it. Every snap might not have been perfect — (Vikings linebacker) Harrison Smith is a heck of a player; he makes life really, really, really, really, really, really hard on you and again — credit to those guys. But I thought our guys stepped up when they needed to and were able to give Jake some time to do what he needed to do."

Are there some plays where you just have to throw it up and trust your guys to come down with the ball like Tee Higgins did on his second touchdown catch to send the game into overtime?

"Yeah. When you have great players — players make plays. I think it was cover-zero and Jake just launched one up to Tee, and Tee went up and got it and scored a touchdown. That's the one area of the field I can't see (from my vantage point), so I still don't know what exactly happened, but I'm just proud ... I can list names of guys all day that stepped up, (and) guys who maybe faced some adversity at some point in the game — maybe a play didn't go their way and then they put their head down — and then just came right back up and made some big plays for us down the stretch."

Was the game today, with the adversity early on before the big catches, a microcosm of Tee Higgins' season?

"All I can say is we always count on Tee Higgins. Tee stepped up big for us, and those were two big touchdowns that he scored for us at the end of the game, and he also made some bigger catches across the middle at other points. So again, we're always counting on Tee, and he came up big for us."

With the game literally coming down to a matter of inches today over and over again, what does it say about the fight in the locker room when you have wins like the one today?

"It's an emotional game. That thing was a roller coaster. That's kind of like the season a little bit. You just have to be able to stay composed and not panic. Just like when you're down in the season, you're down in this game and our guys just — there's no fear, there's no 'Oh, here we go.' It's just, 'Who's going to step up and makes the play that keeps us in this thing?'"

"I remember being down 14 I think, at the end of the third quarter if I'm not mistaken, and just feeling like, 'We're in this. We just have to score, our defense will get a stop and we don't have to start throwing the ball every play because it's a two score game.' It

didn't feel like that, and it in fact, that came true for us."

After the game, a lot of guys coming off the field screamed out one word as they were heading into the locker room: "Believe." Is that something the coaching staff has been preaching to the players?

"That's not coming from me. Maybe those guys watch 'Ted Lasso' (laughs). The guys do believe, you know? ... We've talked a lot about how we have to be our strongest here in December and January. Just kind of reflecting back over the last couple of years, everything we do is geared towards (the) offseason training camp (and during) regular seasons, to being at our best now. And these last few weeks, we've been pretty dang good. So, we just have to keep that moving. We've got a big one next week. We know that. We've got to get our minds right, (and) get rested. It's going to be a physical game. Guys are going to be worn out. (So now), they've got to get their minds right, and come back in here on Tuesday ready to work."

Why has Jake Browning been so good at situation football during these last two games?

"We talk about it. We meet every week as a team. (Myself, secondary/cornerbacks coach) Charles Burks, (assistant linebackers coach) Jordan Kovacs — they're situation masters this season. They've done a great job educating the guys in situations that don't come up that often. When you've got great veterans that understand these moments, there's no panic. They do a really good job staying composed and making plays."

Are these the type of games that give you confidence this is a playoff team?

"That's not how I think about it. Now, I'm just able to think about Pittsburgh and what we need to do. It's really too much to think about down the road all week (as we need to) control what we do these last three weeks. You don't have to worry about everybody else. I'm confident if we just win this next one, then we're in control of what we can control. That's really the message to the guys: Just focus on Pittsburgh, and don't worry about anything else right now."

**JAKE BROWNING
Quarterback**

Can we get your general reactions to that game now that you've have a couple minutes to decompress?

"I feel like I need a beer, but I'm right off of a cramping incident, so I'm probably going to pass on that. Yeah, that was a roller coaster. Obviously, the overtime was similar to Jacksonville, but in Jacksonville we were always kind of right even with them. This one, we got down and hadn't played great in the first half. Then, I threw the pick in the second half, and (then) rallied from there. So, there were some big-time plays being made. A couple of shout-outs ... First of all, to Drew Sample, who played with a stomach virus and was feeling terrible. We needed him really badly because these guys blitz a lot. and he's incredible in protection. Another one to Joe Mixon. No running back wants to sit there and just be in protection all day long, but that was the best chance to put up some points, and all that. He did a great job. Then, our O-line, starting with Ted Karras ... Just the communication. There were very few protection calls I even needed to make — I can't even talk, I'm so tired — because he directed the whole show. It was a very exotic scheme (the Vikings' defense), and so I just wanted to point out those three guys."

What is your reaction to Tee Higgins' second touchdown catch?

"Yeah, I would have included him too, but I think everyone knows that one's obvious. I was hot, they brought a Ponzi pressure I believe, and I just had to drift it and give someone a chance with it. I always feel good just throwing the ball up to Tee. There were a couple of times this game where I just threw it up to him, and good things seemed to happen. We were really close on it a couple of times, and I'll just continue to keep throwing the ball up to him when those opportunities present themselves because he's very good at it."

So that was a blitz that you needed to get rid of it?

"Yeah. I haven't watched the tape of anything, but it was a pressure where they're bringing more than we can block, and it beats whatever our protection call was. So, I was hot off of — I think it was Harrison Smith— and just drifted away and threw it up."

Can you take us through the play to Tyler Boyd for 44 yards in overtime?

"They blitz a lot, they drop a lot. A lot was made about the scheme — it's a really good scheme, (and) that was part of it. They drop a lot of people, so I don't know if there were three or four rushing there, but I believe it was three, and so there's not a lot of timing plays that are open when they drop eight. So, Pitch (quarterbacks coach Dan Pitcher) our quarterback coach had said that I'm going to need to move around and make some plays with my legs. Throughout the whole week, he had been saying that. So, that's where that came from. He (Tyler Boyd) did a good job of coming back at a friendly angle. I think Tee (Higgins) thought he was getting the ball as well, so they kind of crossed full speed. T.B. got the ball, and I think that's what spun him on the run — (that) half the DBs thought Tee was about to catch it, and the other half thought T.B. was doing it. Everybody just kind of ran into each other. I thought he was going to score, but then I was glad (he went down) for ball security. I think if that was the second quarter, and not the end of the game, on that situation, he probably would have scored."

How about the third-and-20 throw to Ja'Marr Chase?

"I think that came open because we ran a similar play earlier in the game where I missed Charlie Jones down the middle. So, when you throw one of those, and they're playing a lot of two deep and having someone run the middle, once you throw one of those earlier in the game, you have to respect it later. So, I think that was a product of that."

What was it like out there? You were obviously calm, but it was very loud and things were going a mile a minute. What's going through your mind when all of that is happening? Was it as loud as you've ever heard it?

"Yeah, it was loud. Our fans definitely had their one-more-drink and came to the game. So, you definitely felt it when the defense was on there, and just the energy of the stadium was really good. I'm kind of in a position where I just detach from that. I feel like the louder it gets, the quieter it gets just in my own head, I guess. But, I think that played a big factor. There were some false starts, delay of games. It was tough for them to communicate, and it was a fun atmosphere to play in."

Why do you think the offense was able to find rhythm at the end of the game, after spending three quarters not really finding rhythm?

"Like I've said before, it's not as bad or as good as you think on tape. My first half was pretty bad I thought. So, at halftime, it was basically like, 'Alright, that was a bad first half. Just get it back together.' Then, I came out and threw a pick. I just basically told myself, 'OK, that was a bad decision. Just keep rallying.' I felt really good about our scheme. There was a lot made of the defensive scheme, which it's tough. It is a hard scheme to deal with, and they do a great job with so many different people in so many different positions presenting a lot of different looks. I guess another shout-out to (offensive coordinator) Brian Callahan. The first thing he told me when we came in the building on Tuesday was, 'I think you're going to throw for 500 yards.' I was like, 'OK, sounds good.' But that kind of set

the tone for the week, 'OK, we're going to keep attacking. They're an attacking, blitzing defense, and don't let that get you into a shell. Keep attacking.' So, I think we were able to keep that mindset and finally put together some points."

You talked about Joe Mixon. You went into the pass protection, but he also made one of the plays of the game where he's stopped in the backfield on fourth-and-one and his second effort went for a touchdown ...

"Joe Mixon's like a battering ram. I just feel like the more touches he gets, the more he kind of is our tone setter on offense. It starts with the O-line, but when he's able to ... When they put 11 guys on the line of scrimmage and in the box, and we're still able to run the ball ... There's going to be one that's going to be unblocked, and you just have to run him over. He's really good at that; he's a battering ram. Then also, to be able to hand off an inside zone and all the sudden he's bouncing and running around everybody. To have a running back that can do both is huge."

Did you see the defense's fourth-down stop in the overtime period, and what does that say about those guys that they literally didn't give up an inch on back-to-back plays?

"I think one part of that was calling the timeout right before the third down. The first down, they tried to just get on the ball and snap it quickly, and we called a timeout which lets us get set and lets us really come off the ball too. It's impressive. It's third-and-one and fourth-and-inches with the game on the line. Everybody is going to talk about the Tyler Boyd throw and catch, but if they (Minnesota) get that, they're probably kicking a field goal and winning the game."

You've made it pretty clear that you try to stay even keeled. Earlier this week, you spoke about the Steelers loss, and said that because you were involved in that game, it hurt more than a typical loss has. On the flip side, does a comeback win in overtime feel even sweeter?

"Yeah. I'm not going to sit here and say it's not a good feeling. It's much better than losing. I think the emotional roller coaster is part of the game, and part of that is just me staying even keel. There was definitely a little extra part (to this game). I remember getting cut there (Minnesota) the last time, and just being told, 'Hey, we might have a spot for you on the practice squad. Go to the hotel and wait.' So, I sat in the hotel for a couple of hours not knowing if I had a job or not, and just basically got a call from my agent. They didn't tell me. I had been there for two years. I've been cut my fair share of times, and that was probably the (crappiest) one. There was a little bit more (to this game) this week. I know I denied it, and there are some great people over there. It's completely different (now) — a completely different coaching staff and everything — and I want to emphasize that there are some incredible people over there, but that one (today's win) felt good. I think, right after we made the field goal to win the game, I screamed at a camera and said, 'They never should have cut me!'"

Did you know earlier in the week then that you were just going to play down those emotions until afterwards?

"Yeah. You can't say that the whole week and then go lose. You kind of just wait until you win, and then don't look like an idiot."

As the starting quarterback of this team, you guys have won three straight. What's your confidence level leading this team into the playoffs?

"High, but I think we're going to play an important game next week. We play the Steelers. I played terrible against them last time, so I'm pretty focused on that."

Tee Higgins talked about how it was time for him to be the alpha when Ja'Marr Chase went out. When Ja'Marr goes out and you're tasked with winning the game, what's going through your mind?

"Ja'Marr (Chase) is one of best players and has been for a couple years, but sometimes that's just going to happen. It's a physical game; stuff happens. He made an incredible catch — I think on the play where he got hurt — he made the crazy third-and-long catch over the middle that we referenced earlier. Maybe Tee (Higgins) feels differently, but I feel like they're both alphas the entire time. That's a 1-A/1-B. I have a ton of comfort. Maybe Tee doesn't feel that way, but I throw it to him like he's going to be the alpha all the time. So, it didn't really change my mindset. Obviously, you want to have Ja'Marr out there, but Andrei (Iosivas) has done a lot of great stuff in practice. I have a ton of confidence. Really no matter who's out there, I'm going to throw to where the coverage tells me to throw, and it's on them to win. So, once you get outside of that mindset, that's when you start to make some bad decisions."

Given what you just said about the context of this game and what it means to you personally, how long will you savor this one as opposed to other wins?

"It's nice to not be on a short week, so maybe a little bit longer. I'll probably go to dinner with my family — probably get that posted on Twitter again. Then, move on after that. I'll watch the film of it tomorrow and move on."

Your first game here when you signed on that practice squad was against this club and you beat them in overtime. Now today, you're the guy doing it ...

"Yeah, it feels good to win. I'm not sure where to take that one."

You shook your head after the interception all the way back to the sideline. What were you thinking after you threw that?

"It was a dumb throw."

Why was it a dumb throw?

"Because I threw it right to the corner, but also because I just felt like — I usually do a good job of not pressing — and I felt like I pressed there. I was trying to make the play to get us back in and get us rolling when the guy underneath was open. So, I should have just thrown it there."

You just talked about your raw feelings when you found out you were cut by the Vikings. For Tee Higgins, given what he's gone through this year from an adversity standpoint this season, how much sweeter does it make it for him to make that kind of statement play in a really important game?

"I'm a huge fan of Tee Higgins, whatever his situation is with contract stuff and all that. I've never been that guy. I've never been in that situation, but I've been the guy that you have personal stuff going on, or you're on a (practice) squad or you want a contract — everybody does. But I've never felt in the locker room that he's made it about that or anything like that. So, that speaks to his character. He's a really enjoyable guy to be around. So, I think anytime you have somebody like that — obviously, it's a fortunate situation where you're right on the cusp of that, but maybe you feel this close, and then it's not happening. That can mess with people, and I haven't felt like that has messed with him at all. He's had some unfortunate injuries, but he's made some incredible plays. I don't really care if he has some drops — if he makes crazy plays like that, I'll just keep throwing him the ball and good things are going to happen."

MIKE HILTON

Cornerback

Can you explain what DJ Reader means to this team?

"I know a lot of people want to say people like me or Sam (Hubbard) are the heart of this defense, but that's our leader and it sucks what happened to him. It's next man up. We've got a big game next week. We'll be ready."

Do you feel like the rest of the season you'll play for DJ Reader and that he will be a part of what motivates you guys?

"Definitely. When you lose one of your leaders, everybody has to step up even more. On the offensive side, obviously with Joe (Burrow) going down, those guys stepped up, so now on the defensive side with DJ going down, we have to step up."

Do you feel you can still make the playoffs?

"Absolutely. No question about it. We know who we are as a team. We know what we've done over these last two years. When we play our brand of ball we're a hard team to beat."

What did you think of Jake Browning's play today?

"That's Jake, man. I'm not surprised. (Inside) this locker room, nobody's surprised. Jake is a hard-working dude waiting for his opportunity. His confidence is through the roof. He's just a gamer once he gets on the field, so shout out to him."

B.J. HILL

Defensive tackle

You had takeaways, but that fourth-down stop in overtime was immense, right?

"That was our goal. We had to get the stop at the line and keep them short."

What is it about this football team's character?

"A lot of people gave up on us. You can't give up on a team like this. We're hungry. We love the competitiveness and everything."

What was going through everybody's mind when DJ Reader went down, and then Ja'Marr Chase?

"It hurt pretty bad with DJ going down. Hopefully it's not too bad. It's unfortunate. Guys got more snaps than usual, but it's all good. We got the win. The hope is everyone gets back healthy."

Your mindset has been one game at a time. You beat the Vikings in overtime and now come the Pittsburgh Steelers. Just one game at a time and who knows where it takes you, right?

"That's it. Our destiny is in our hands."

What was said at halftime?

"We just felt like we just gave up some stuff at the beginning of the game."

EVAN McPHERSON

Kicker

What were your thoughts going into overtime? You had a similar thing your first year against the Vikings.

"Whenever the game got sent to overtime, I was just thinking about my dogs. They've been up for so long. I mean, I just felt bad for them. I wanted to make sure we got the game to end early."

"It is funny that some of my game-winners — my rookie year we had one against the Jags and we had one against the Jags this year, and the Vikings the same, so it's kind of funny how that all works out. I thought everybody executed well. They did a really good job."

You had two against Kansas City your rookie year ...

"Yeah. Kansas City is one of those teams where it came down to the wire and it comes down to every single point. I think that's what it comes down to. All those teams we've kicked the game-winners against, they've just been good teams. You know, every point matters."

How would you describe Jake Browning's play to this point?

"He's doing really good. I think everybody has a lot of confidence in him. I think it started a couple games ago. Everybody knew what we had as a backup quarterback. He's doing a great job with his opportunities."

What was your view of Tyler Boyd's catch in overtime? Were you watching or practicing kicks?

"I was watching on the field. I kind of saw Jake (Browning) scramble out to the right and saw T.B. kind of running across the middle. It was honestly one of the targets, if I was Jake, that I would have picked out. It was a good play. They made a good situation out of nothing."

Three games ago, after losing to Pittsburgh, your playoff situation looked bleak. Now you've put yourself in a position where if you take care of business, you can make it ...

"I think that was kind of the talk we had in the team meeting. The loss to Pittsburgh sucks, but you kind of hold your own destiny in your hands. If we win out there's probably a pretty good chance that we get to sneak in there in the playoffs. We're doing everything we can to stay prepared and win every game."

GERMAINE PRATT

Linebacker

You led the team today with 12 tackles and had a half-sack. How did it feel overall to get that stop in overtime and allow your team to have a chance to win this one?

"It's very important. We know what's at stake. We know what we had to do. What's a better feeling than being on field on a fourth-and-one? And I don't know who sliced it, but I think it was B.J. B.J. got underneath 56 (Garrett Bradbury), the guy from NC State. He did his job. They couldn't do anything."

What is the feeling like knowing that you've managed to keep your season alive?

"It feels great. We never get too high, never get too low. We know what we want to do. Our leader went down and Jake (Browning) stepped up. We still have goals. We still have the same guys who lead us around. We have superstars around. You have Tee (Higgins) balling. You have Uno (Ja'Marr Chase) getting the ball. You have (Joe) Mixon. You have Chase (Brown). You have dynamic players around them."

What did you think of Tee Higgins' second touchdown when he had to contort his body?

"That's just Tee. He is long and lanky. With a jump ball, all you have to do is throw it up there. He's going to make that play. He'll come out. Most people are about 50-50 with those balls but those balls are 90-10 for him when you throw the ball up in the air for him."

What does it say about this team to lose multiple leaders and continue to fight back and grit through these wins?

"It's all because of our culture. Zac (Taylor) started a culture here that's unbreakable. Everybody is looking each other in our eyes, and they are ready to go. Next man stands up, next man steps up. There's no drop-off. You just have to step up and make plays."

TEE HIGGINS**Wide receiver****Your second touchdown looked like a combination of boxing out the defender and high-pointing the ball ...**

"Sometimes that's what you have to do in order to get the ball especially when the (defensive back) has better leverage than you. I was able to get in position and make a play on the ball."

How did you have the presence of mind to wrap the ball around the pylon?

"I knew where I was on the field. I knew it was thrown a little bit short. We were practicing that play all week and (Jake Browning) left it a little short. Obviously, he had pressure. I caught it and was able to make the play."

What was going through your mind throughout this game? It was almost a tale of two halves for you, and you came alive in the fourth quarter and made game changing plays ...

"Yeah, definitely. The very first play, I obviously had a drop, but (Ja'Marr) Chase kept telling me, 'Next play mentality,' and then right before the half I had the big catch. But they said it wasn't a catch. So obviously, as a receiver you want to make those plays, especially in times like that, to get points at the end of the half. We weren't able to, but I was able to come back in the second half."

When you saw that ball in the air on the touchdown, what was running through your mind as it was coming down approaching you?

"Make a play, honestly. Especially when the team needed me. The team needed it the most right there. And I was able to make the play right there."

Can you talk about the body control it took to know where you were on the field?

"I happen to know where I was on the field and at the same time I was right there on the sideline, so I had to stay in bounds and then I knew I caught it around the one (yard line). So, I just took a wild guess and reached back and looked up at the ref and he had his arms up with a touchdown."

TYLER BOYD**Wide receiver****Take us through the play in overtime. How did it happen for you?**

"Well, initially I was the throw anyway. I was open if you go back and watch the play. But (Jake Browning) had pressure and I just tried to stay with him and just stay in that open void where I know he can find me, and I can at least make the catch and get the first down. Now the rest, I was just trying to be a guy and go make a play."

Do you have a move there to get open?

"I just had to find the open void and find some separation from the defense. It was kind of crazy because as I was going, I saw Tee (Higgins) reacting. I'm going that way, he was reacting the other way because the middle of the field is open. So, he was thinking that the ball was going to him, and I was kind of tense up thinking we were going to collide. So, I'm like, 'Look, I just have to go ahead and make this catch. Which one of us going to catch it? We have to catch it.'"

Was colliding with Tee Higgins the main thought before you made the catch?

"Yes. That was the only thing, that we would just collide and neither one of us make the play. It's third down. Third-and-12 or 11 or something like that. That was the turning point and the most crucial play of the game. Thankfully, I ended up being able to catch the ball and making a play and getting us in position to win."



VIKINGS POSTGAME QUOTES

DEC. 16, 2023

MINNESOTA AT CINCINNATI

KEVIN O'CONNELL

Head coach

Initial comments ...

"To start with an injury update, (DL Jonathan) Bullard did have an ankle evaluated and he did come back to the football game. A very unfortunate, on-the-road battle with a team that is playing well right now. I felt like we let one slip away, but you have to credit the Bengals, getting their offense going in the second half. We just didn't capitalize on our last opportunity offensively — even just a couple inches to get the first down, and they were able to get us stopped. I thought we had a good look at it on third down, but officials spotted it otherwise, so they probably had a better look than I did. We have to be able to get a little bit more than that, in that moment of an 'inches' type situation. I thought that Nick Mullens stepped in and led us to a very efficient day — explosive offense, and play-pass got the run game going. I thought Ty Chandler was outstanding. Defensively, we played a great first half that allowed us to score on our first drives of each half and generate a lead that we were, unfortunately, unable to hold on to there. Credit to Jake Browning and Zac (Taylor) and their offense for hitting the gas there in the second half."

Can they look at that spot on third-and-inches?

"I was told they did. I was getting some information from the guys up top. If they told me they didn't look at it. I was going to take the time out, but I was told that they did look at it. The guys upstairs were still saying it just would have come down to that point if there was the visual evidence. I think the guys up top were looking at their view of it looking down, and seeing Nick's (Mullens') second effort there. I started calling a first-and-10 play, but the side judge on the other side must have had him short."

What's your thought process on repeating that play a second time?

"I think anytime you're inside of a couple of feet, and then looking at about four or five inches there, we don't really want to have to turn around and extend the ball and hand off another ball. I trust our guys in that moment to execute with a push right there. Based on how well they were spotted, they got the stop and then transitioned that to an explosive run to give themselves a chance to win the game."

Is that why Brandon Powell was the pusher?

"Yes, we (were) trying to keep them out (there) if we could."

What is it about the defense late in games when you guys are one stop away from winning? It seems like that backside dig always come to the table, especially these last three to four weeks ...

"I think teams are probably seeing a way to hold up if we send a pressure. That's one thing. If we don't, they're trying to find some pockets in our zones. There's been some hard throws on the dig cuts, and we have to find a way to crowd that area of the field and make them throw it somewhere else. I know that, defensively, our guys were battling all the way down to the very end, and that's where you have to give them credit for making a few of those plays. They're third-and-long, and they get a play to Higgin's for the touchdown. Then the Boyd catch on another one. They made some huge plays that they had to make with how the game was going. I did like our offensive response to take the lead back after they were able to tie it up, especially on the road in this environment. That was really positive to see. But, once again, we didn't do enough when we did get our chance there in overtime to at least give Greg (Joseph) a chance for the field goal."

Nick Mullens had two interceptions inside of the 25 — and the one that was nullified. How concerned are you about those plays?

"I think the biggest thing is Nick showed that he can execute our offense and really move the football team. I think what we've got to continue to work through are those plays where we don't try to do too much. The first one he had a little bit of man coverage and had guys running away. We were hoping at the very least to put it in play for a chance to try to run away, and if not, we're in field goal range. We were trying to be smart with football, and he wanted to take a chance there, and they ending up making a play on the football. The second one, the pocket collapses there. He's trying to get that ball thrown away — (need) more repetition and understanding in that moment. We had a great chance at three, even if we do end up taking a sack, we still had a chance to put points on the board based upon the drive that we had. On the the third one that got called back, we have a play there where, he can either throw it to Ty (Chandler) frontside or JJ (Justin Jefferson) on the backside, and when he did see the defender immediately cross the line of scrimmage, that forced him to throw one back into the boundary when the look might have presented itself out to the field. All of which are things that can be worked on. Nick's out there for the second time this season, and there's a lot to work through. But as far as the yardage, we were able to generate a couple of big plays to help us score. I thought Nick Mullens played well enough to give us a chance to go to overtime on the road and win a game as a team. We just didn't do enough in the end."

Are you assuming Nick starts against the Lions next week?

"We'll evaluate then, but he did a lot of good things today. I liked the feel of both our run game and pass game, and how (they were) working together. We'll take a look at it, watch the film, and make a decision moving forward. Nick Mullens played how I expected him to play. We still need to find a way to protect the football when it's in our hands on all downs. We continue to strive for the execution of the other 10 guys around the quarterback, which I thought, for the most part today, was pretty solid."

What stood out about the way Ty Chandler ran the ball today?

"We wanted to feature Ty and it kind of happened. I think he had every carry but one from the running back position today. Great cuts a couple times on some unblocked crack force corners. He made a great cut on the long run to get us down there for the last touchdown. He's finding it, he's seeing it, he's getting better and better, and he had some really nice protection pickups on some of those play passes as well. (It was a) huge growth day for him, I look forward to keep him going and love where Ty is at right now."

At this point in the season, it feels like you must win every week. After today, what's your message to the team?

"That's a great question. I think we've got to understand and evaluate this really hard — players and coaches. Throughout the 60, almost 70 minutes of football there, there were the plays where we could have given ourselves a better chance to put the game away or get one more stop. Then to continue to find those one-play phases in the kicking game where we're stealing yardage, possibly turning the football over. I thought NaJee (Thompson) had a great effort on that one late in the game that was very close to possibly being a turnover forced. But can we make that one play? You never know when it's going to come. It's not always going to be in overtime or in a critical fourth-quarter drive or defensively a third-down stop late in the game. It could be that early first, second-quarter, third-quarter. The margin of error right now by no means is any sort of an excuse. We've got to go make the plays in all three phases of our team to win these games. We're very fortunate to have two of them at home and all three in the NFC North. We know all three teams. The two teams that we'll play are playing good football right now and we're going to need to put together some good plans and try to get as healthy as we can and go attack every opportunity to go try to win them all."

Do you feel that Justin Jefferson's return opened up things for Jordan Addison in this game?

"There was coverage being dictated with some doubles and some combo coverages to him, and Jordan took advantage of it. He was single-covered on that touchdown, screened in underneath there and Nick (Mullens) found him. What a catch and finish there. I thought all across the

board, Justin Jefferson's ability to still get down the field, attack. When he had coverage, T.J. (Hockenson) and Jordan were really playing off some of those looks and attacking as well, and Nick finding those guys. I'm really happy with our offensive execution with the run and pass game. I would have liked score a few more points."

NICK MULLENS

Quarterback

Initial comments ...

"Obviously, an absolute grind of a football game, but those are the types of games you want to be in. Obviously, we have to finish, and we couldn't do that today, so that's really unfortunate. There is area for an improvement and there are things to be encouraged about so this team is going to keep pressing forward."

The second interception, were you just trying to get rid of the ball or did you see something open downfield?

"I was trying to get rid of the football. I don't want to take sacks. Analytically, probably smarter to just take the sack, but I was just trying to get rid of the football."

Did you think you had the first down on the first sneak in overtime?

"Yeah, I did. There's also a lot of carnage, I guess you could say, right there in the middle, so you're not exactly sure. But I felt like it was a pretty good attempt. Whatever happens, you have to find a way to execute, and we have to find a way to get it done. This stinks for sure."

You guys were able to move the ball effectively throughout the game. What was your comfort level with Justin Jefferson?

"I thought the guys did great. Obviously, the goals are to operate and execute all day long. It's fun throwing the ball to Justin Jefferson, you can definitely tell he's a great football player, really against all coverages. Our whole group was solid today — K.J. (Osborn), T.J. (Hockenson), Jordan Addison — obviously with huge plays. The O-line absolutely battled up front. I felt great in the pocket, and the running back toted the rock very well, so collectively I was pleased with our performance, but the margin of error is so small. That's why you work as hard as you can because you never know what play it's going to be that changes the game, so the margin of error is so small, but I love our group and we're not backing down."

Best rushing performance by this team all season — did you see something going into the game that led you to believe that would work or was it just there?

"I think it's just the flow of the game. Every game is its own entity, every game is different. When you can run the ball and stay on schedule like that first drive, we can be a very efficient offense. The running backs and the O-line did a great job with the push up front. Ty (Chandler) has obviously got that burst to him. I've known that since camp, we've known that since camp. So yeah, that's awesome any time you can run the ball and be complementary as an offense with the pass game and the run game, that's huge."

The first interception that you threw targeting Justin Jefferson there, what did you see on the play that made you put the ball in that spot?

"I saw some space out front, and I just have to be careful, I have to be disciplined. Obviously, knowing we have points on the board, so that's a mistake that I'll regret, I guess you could say. You cannot turn the ball over in the red zone. Like I said, the margin of error is so small. You'd like to avoid those plays, and I definitely have to fix that."

On the touchdown to Jordan Addison, what did you see? I guess you may have seen it after on the replay.

"Yeah, I actually haven't seen the replay yet. Basically, I just kind of pictured it like a guy boxing somebody out in basketball. Picturing a guy on the block boxing someone out, asking for the ball inside. That's really in my mind kind of how it was. He had an inside lane, and like I said I haven't seen the tape yet, so I just tried to leave it a tick inside and he made a great play."

So, did you not actually see him catch it, falling backward?

"No, I didn't."

What was the last thing you saw?

"I just saw him boxing the guy out with some space inside. I left it inside where I felt like only he could get it. Obviously, he made a great play and then I see the guys celebrating when I'm on the ground, so that's a cool play and obviously glad it worked."

Three games left, what's the mindset to turn the page from a tough loss like this.

"Yeah, we are aware that playoffs are still an opportunity, and that's the opportunity and the goal that we are all chasing. But at the same time, we have been so focused on one thing at a time, one play at a time, each drive at a time, each press conference at a time. So, I'm trying to be totally present and trying to enjoy each step of the way. We know we're a good football team. Great defense, great special teams, productive offense. We have to just put it together as a complete team unit. We can, and that's what we're all striving for, for sure, and we're excited to get back to work."

On the third and fourth downs, Kevin O'Connell talked about wanting to stay in 11 personnel there. When you guys are in that spot, is it always Brandon Powell doing the push there, or are there other guys that have been in that spot in 11 personnel?

"Every short yardage plan is a little bit different every week, so whatever play is called we're going to execute. Like I said, the schematics of it is different every week, so we just focus on what's called."

DANIELLE HUNTER

Linebacker

What do you think the Bengals were doing well that you just couldn't figure out?

"That's a great football team. We game planned against them, and unfortunately we had more mistakes than they had, and we lost the turnover battle, so they came out on top."

For you, with the season you're having, what does this mean for you personally?

"I'm a guy that's about going out there and doing what I need to do for my teammates. It's not about me, it's about the team. I'm doing what I can for them."

From your vantage point, what happened on that last play where Jake Browning threw to Tyler Boyd to set up the field goal?

"They just made a play at the end of the game. Nothing we could have done about that. (He) just threw the ball downfield and made a play."

How difficult is it for the team to go up 17-3 in the second half to ultimately lose?

"That was a tough one. You're good all week, and then right at the end came up short, lost the turnover battle, so we definitely got to get better at that."

JUSTIN JEFFERSON

Wide receiver

How do you feel Nick Mullens played despite the two turnovers he had?

"Great. Nick did a fantastic job today, especially with just a week of preparation of him being the starting quarterback. I feel like he came out today with confidence, and I feel like we're all together, and he leaned on each one of us to help him throughout the game. He did a fantastic job."

Where do you guys go from here?

"We feel like every time we lose it's self-inflicted. It's not something we're getting physically out-beat on, so we just need to fix the few things we need to fix on offense, defense, and special teams, come back next week with a divisional game at home. It's definitely a good week to bounce back, and get a W for the division."

How did it feel to be back out there?

"It felt great. Felt great to play a full game again, felt great to be out there with my teammates making plays. It's definitely been a long time coming."

How tough was it on those back-to-back plays where the 'tush push' didn't work?

"Oh, it's definitely tough. It's a game of inches. We had a few inches to get on that fourth down, and weren't able to get it. That's the tough part, especially when the defense gives us the ball in overtime, and we have the opportunity to go down and score and put the game away, and we can't get a few inches to continue the drive. That's the tough part about it, but we had some great things we did in the game. Nick (Mullens) played outstanding the whole entire game, so we've just got to lean on that, think about the positives, go into tomorrow and the rest of the week fixing our mistakes, and be ready for the divisional game next week."

It was interesting seeing Brandon Powell being the one to be behind Nick Mullens on the fourth-and-one in overtime. Is that something that you all practice?

"Oh yeah. Every play we do, we go out there and practice it enough for us to be comfortable to call it. We just couldn't get the couple inches to get the first down."

You mentioned a lot of self-inflicted losses. What does it feel like coming off the field knowing that was the reason you guys lost?

"It's kind of been something that's been with us for a couple of these games we lose. We've just got to keep looking at the drawing board, keep thinking about the things that we need to fix, but there's a lot of things we can take away from this game on the positive side. We have Nick (Mullens) coming in and making some big, tremendous plays for us, was able to communicate good, and everybody was on the same page. So, we just need to fix those minor errors that we have, and I feel like we played pretty good though."

What's your feeling on whether this team can make the playoffs?

"We always feel confident about that, especially when we have three more opportunities against divisional (teams). We're still in it, we're still right there. Even this game, we're one, two plays away from winning the game. That's the difficult part about it, but it is what it is, we've got to move on and think about next week."

TY CHANDLER**Running back****How'd it feel out there with your first 100-yard game?**

"Felt great, big shout out to the O-line. I couldn't have done it without them changing the line of scrimmage. They all did a great job, and I'm real thankful for them. It's just a blessing to be out there. Big shout out to my running back room for getting me ready for this moment, and going out there and seizing it."

When you knew you were going to get the lion's share of the carries today, what was your mentality coming in to the game?

"It's just like any other game — just preparing to be ready, and going out there and executing at a high level. Like I said, big shout out to the O-line and all the guys in the running back room getting ready this week. Now it's on to the next one."

You seemed to have really strong vision out there today. What did you see that helped you be so successful?

"Like I said, just being ready to seize the moment. Like you said, vision — running with patience, and just being able to get the ball downhill."

It's been a little tough for the running back room this year just getting efficiency. Why do you think it was so helpful today to get things going, and how do you feel you kind of paced the offense?

"Like I said, those big guys up front changed the line of scrimmage. I wouldn't be able to do it without them, so big credit to them."

How tough is it when you have such a good day, and the offense did some good things, to not come away with this one?

"It's tough, but we've got to fix what we need to and go back to work. It's tough, but I'm grateful for it, and looking forward to the next opportunity."

JORDAN ADDISON**Wide receiver****How tough is it to lose this game when you're so close at the end?**

"Yeah, they do suck. It's terrible, but we've just got to finish better and take care of the ball in the red zone. I feel like that was the big thing. We had the ball down in the red zone and turned it over a couple of times."

What did you see in your offense today that you have a lot of faith in moving ahead?

"We just showed what we could do. We moved the ball down field a lot. We showed what we could do, but we've just got to be consistent in doing it."

These next few games are important for you. What do you need to do to keep your spirits up for the playoff push?

"Just go 1-0 next week. Take it one week at a time, and we'll be straight."