



BENGALS POSTGAME QUOTES

SEPT. 25, 2023

L.A. RAMS AT CINCINNATI

ZAC TAYLOR

Head coach

How much of a relief was this win?

"You have to get that first win. It changes the week, the momentum. To hear them get a chance to sing the song in the locker room is good. It creates positive energy for the week, which we haven't had. You feel that hanging over you. Our guys managed this game well and it starts with the defense. They set the tone while the offense was getting their feet underneath them. To hold them to six points at halftime and then allow the offense to get momentum and play with a lead, (that) is the football we're used to playing."

How much did you work out Joe Burrow and when did you know he'd be good to go?

"He did a little bit this morning, just to take the place of his pregame stuff he usually does."

What were the conversations like?

"We were in good shape the last few days."

Ja'Marr Chase was vocal about getting the ball more. Did he exceed your expectations?

"No, because I have a high standard for Ja'Marr. We're trying to find as many ways as we can to get him the ball, that's not new. He stepped up to the challenge and made some big plays."

How much was Joe Burrow lobbying to play today?

"He's a competitor."

Did you know he'd be able to throw it 49 times?

"There were a lot of run-pass options involved in that. We'll watch and see how many we called. There's a lot of times we're calling a run and he's taking a completion. He is usually efficient at that. We'll look at how many calls we called. There was a three or four-series stretch where we couldn't get that first efficient play on a run or pass. They did a good job of setting us back there. We were able to adjust to that in the second half."

Can you assess the defense's performance and what it meant to finally play with a lead?

"No kidding. That's the whole key. We tried to start fast but stalled out with the missed field goal. But our defense kept us in it. Holding them to one of 11 on third downs, two interceptions, (six) sacks, and the run defense was all outstanding. That's understated because it forces them into situations where they have to throw it and then we can get the pressure. Lou (Anarumo) did a great job dialing up pressures at the right time."

How big was the turnaround moment with DJ Reader's sack?

"It was enormous. I'm not sure who made the play to help get him out on the reverse, but it's a big stand by our defense. To not be deflated when they think they got scored on, then have to go back out there with the ball on the three. Then DJ sets the tone right there. Our guys played tremendous on defense."

What was going on with all of those motion penalties?

"It was three different people on three different snaps. We can't have that because it affected our cadence going forward for a few possessions. They timed up their pressures after that. We have to rectify that, and it's not been us. We've been a disciplined team that wins the penalty battle."

Was there ever a moment you thought Joe Burrow wasn't able to go?

"You just never fully know. You just want honest responses from him, which he gave. You talk to the doctors and everyone gets on the same page, and he goes out there and delivers that type of performance."

What led to you putting him in the spot on the naked rollout to Ja'Marr?

"That was a discussion we had the last few days, whether we felt comfortable with it. I asked him a few plays before and he felt good about it. It's a quick toss, probably seven steps before he whipped out the bench route to Ja'Marr. He did a great job, stopped his head around and was ready for 97 (Michael Hoecht) on the edge. Ja'Marr did a great job coming out of it and selling it like he was on the backside of the run."

How important was the total team effort to pick Joe Burrow up when he's not 100 percent?

"There's no doubt. That's what this team is about. Joe's toughness, we're used to it, so you take it for granted at times. He's played through a lot these four years. It's appreciated when your quarterback goes out and is dealing with something and able to battle through it, throwing the ball 40-something times. He escaped a couple pressures and got the ball out, that was big time."

The third-down conversion where Ja'Marr Chase caught it behind himself was a big play...

"I couldn't see very well. I know Joe (Burrow) checked that play. I couldn't tell where the ball was going so it was surprising to see Ja'Marr catch it behind him. I didn't see the window but it put us in the red zone."

What was the thought process of throwing a pistol fake pitch play action deep ball?

"Try not to put your quarterback under center, so you have to be creative."

How challenging has it been to find the deep ball?

“Every game is a little different. First week was a rain game against one of the better fronts in football. Baltimore is pretty hell-bent on as much two-safety and helping on top of our receivers as possible. This week is the same thing, with Aaron Donald up front so they play as soft as humanly possible to keep everything in front and make you go the length of the field. Your defense has to play well then. We have to continue to be patient, creative, and take advantage of the shots when we get them. We may see a lot of that this year with the receivers we have. You have to get used to it.”

Are you comfortable with the direction of the offense?

“No. I thought the first half was really poor. It starts with me not getting us in a good rhythm with the play calls, then the penalties. There’s too much negative going on. In the second half, we played really well. Ahkello Witherspoon’s pick was unbelievable. But we scored a touchdown, a field goal, and then we got into the four-minute mode with the 13 runs. We thought running two minutes off the clock was more valuable given how our defense was playing. The first half was really bad but the second half was really good.”

You took the ball on the coin toss ...

“We hadn’t played with a lead all season. We were down two scores in both games. We felt we wanted to attack early on and put some points on the board. Usually when our defense plays with a lead they play well.”

Was this a must-have win?

“You don’t want to go 0-3. That’s a tough spot to be in; even though we’re confident we can get out of anything and get on a tear, especially with a short week coming up. The crowd we have in these home games; I think we’re 6-0 when the lights come on over the last four years. I just know the feeling I have when the lights are on, the fans are really loud. It causes a lot of problems. The Rams almost called timeout a few times with one second left. Even when they don’t get flagged, our crowd makes a huge impact on these home night games. It was really cool to see all the fans turn out. It was a great night for them.”

What does it say about Joe Burrow to be able to gut this out and maintain his composure?

“That’s the key. At halftime, everybody has to respond the right way, because it’s easy to get frustrated with six points at the half and no rhythm. Everyone was responsible for that. You can say a lot about this team with how they responded in the second half. The defense got turnovers, sacks. The offense moved the ball and ate up time. Special teams stepped up big with punt returns and field goals. The second half was a complete team effort.”

Does it mean anything that you’ve finally beaten the Rams?

“We beat them in the preseason last year. That’s like our only preseason win in four years. There’s no significance to it. You play a lot of friends, family in this league.”

JOE BURROW

Quarterback

How are you feeling?

“I feel good. Good to get the first one.”

Walk us through what led to you ending up playing tonight ...

“I went through a workout this morning and felt good enough to play. I felt good out there.”

What exactly did you want to feel in your pregame workout so you’d have confidence to perform the way you wanted to?

“Don’t have any setbacks. That was basically the criteria for me.”

Did at least doing something at practice on Friday and Saturday, even in a limited situation — did that help?

“Yes, it did. It did. I think it really just gave the decision makers confidence that I was going to be able to go out and do what I needed to.”

When we last talked to you, it felt like you know that this could be a week-to-week thing? Were you mentally preparing to have to deal with this? Was that the case, and how hard was it to get ready mentally for tonight?

“Yes, it still is. It still is. We feel good. We didn’t have any setbacks today, but it’s still day-to-day. I’ve learned through this process that it can happen at any time. So, it was good to get through this one, and that means we’ll be stronger for this week. So, hopefully I can have a full week of practice to prepare for next week.”

How do you have to play differently with this injury?

“I was pretty cautious with extending plays. I was quick to throw the ball away, but we were able to get the job done.”

It looked like you held on to the ball a little bit longer in the second half. Did you start to get more comfortable?

“Just the flow of the game. I still threw a couple [passes] away, (and) I was able to slightly extend a couple [plays]. I think, on offense, we played OK. We still have to be better in a lot of areas. I have to be better, and we have to be better as an offense. We have to not have as many pre-snap penalties. So, there’s a lot — a lot — to improve on.”

One of the game’s biggest offensive plays was you being mobile on a naked bootleg and getting it downfield to Ja’Marr Chase. How did you know you would be comfortable to make that play?

“I didn’t, but I felt good, and it was a good play for us. It was our most explosive play of the game. Ja’Marr had a great game. He showed why he’s one of the best.”

On the third-and-10 where you threw a back shoulder pass to Ja’Marr Chase, was that an example of maybe things are getting better?

“Yes — like I said — there were bright spots. Obviously, we got the win. We played well enough to win, but there’s still so much room to improve — a lot of things left out on the field.”

Were you trying to hit Ja’Marr Chase on the back shoulder because the safety was there?

“Yes, correct. Correct.”

On your golf cart ride with Mike Brown, what did he have to say to you?

“I’ll keep that between us.”

Did you feel like there was all sorts of tension — long-term, 0-3, short-term, your future. How were you balancing it all in your head?

“It was all stuff that you weigh when you’re making that decision. There is the risk to go out there and potentially re-injure it, but there’s also the risk to not go out there and be 0-3. So, I wanted to be out there for my guys, and I was confident that I would be able to do what I needed to to get the win.”

How much lobbying did you do to the decision makers throughout the course of the week, given the confidence you had that you could play?

“Once Friday/Saturday hit, I was pretty confident that I’d be able to do it. So, I voiced that.”

On the third-and-10 throw to Ja’Marr Chase, did your headset go out? Were you having trouble hearing?

“... There were a couple of times throughout the game that there were some headset issues, but I don’t think that was one of them.”

How challenging has it been trying to get explosive plays downfield? You guys haven’t hit it much, and it’s been such a big part of your offense in recent years. Has that been a source of frustration for you right now?

“Yes, those obviously make it a lot easier, but we’ve played three really good defenses that know that know that that’s what we’re good at and are good at taking that away. Then when you’re able to extend plays, those kinds of explosive plays are created in that way. So, I think going forward — the healthier I get — the more we’ll be able to do that.”

How much did the defense’s performance help you so that the game didn’t turn into a crazy shootout, and you could manage the game somewhat?

“Yes, that was critical, that was critical. Once we got that lead in the second half, the defense started to really tee off. As a quarterback, that kind of changes your mindset of the game. You don’t have to take as many chances; you’re not going to try to fit as many into tight windows. When you have a defense like that, they take care of the rest.”

For you personally, was there anything about being able to play in a game like this, finish a game like this, be able to go against Aaron Donald, who had a pretty decent game. Is there anything that this could do for you mentally in being able to move forward?

“Yes, it’s going to be better this week than it was last week. That just comes with time and rest. We have a short week, so it’s going to be a challenge, but I’m confident that we’ll be able to put in the work to be ready for Sunday.”

How did knowing that you’d have to play on a short week going into Tennessee factor into your decision to play tonight?

“That was not a factor. Obviously, when you play a Monday night game, it’s going to be a short week, but I guess I didn’t even think about it until right now.”

How do you feel now compared to what you did after Baltimore?

“It’s way better now ... way better now. There were no setbacks today. I feel good. So, throughout this whole week, it will just continue to get better.”

Ja’Marr Chase said after the game that, ‘All I can do is make Joe look good.’ What does it mean to you to have a guy like Ja’Marr who is willing to say that maybe you should sit out until you’re healthy, but then once you’re on the field, is fully committed to doing whatever it takes to get open?

“Coming into this game, I was going to feed my guy. He was due for one. I knew he was going to have a big game. Just the way he was talking all week, he was excited to play this one. He showed up big for us. He showed why he’s one of the best.”

It sounds like throughout the whole process, Zac Taylor and everyone put a lot of stock into what you had to say, and they took everything you said at face value. What is it like to have that kind of relationship with them?

“That’s really why we’ve been so good. The coaching staff has a great relationship with everybody in the locker room, and that trust has been built. Not just me, but everyone in that locker room feels comfortable going up and talking to Zac and all the coaches and being honest and open. I think that’s going to continue to be a big reason why we win.”

From a satisfaction or pride standpoint, where does this game compare — with the injury, coming from behind — with a 400-yard, four TDs kind of game?

“I’d always rather throw for 400. I pride myself on my availability, and so I was happy to be available for my guys tonight. Obviously, a lot of room to improve, but I was happy — happy to be out there.”

When did you decide in your head that you would be able to play?

“Probably yesterday. Yesterday.”

Did you tell Ja’Marr Chase on the bench pregame that you were going to play?

“Yes, I think it was sometime around then. I told him he was going to get a lot of opportunities today.”

What was Ja’Marr Chase’s reaction to the news that you were playing?

“He was excited. He was excited.”

You’re typically known as a guy that keeps his composure. Was there any level of frustration that started to come in during the first half, or were you able to manage it and stay level-headed?

“Well, there was some frustration with the pre-snap penalties. We have to be better in that area. I thought we controlled the ball really well. ... We had a lot of time of possession, and that was able to keep our defense on the sideline and let them rest. That was big. I think that was a big reason why they ended up playing so well. We only had one touchdown, but we controlled the clock. We need to be better when we cross that 50(-yard line). We were across the 50 quite a bit and weren’t able to put a lot of points on the board. So, we have to be better in that way, but we did control the clock, and I think we were pretty good on third down.”

Logan Wilson said that the way this team operates is that when one side of the ball goes down, the other side picks it up. Is that how this team functions?

“Yes. That’s how it has to be if you want to be a great team. Not every Sunday everybody’s going to show up and play. The defense is going to have a bad game, offense is going to have a bad game (or) special teams is going to have a bad game. It’s what

the other two units do when that happens.”

It's a hard road in the NFL to go 0-3 and get to the playoffs. Big-picture wise, how important was this win for you?

“Yes, it was very, very important. It was part of the reason I wanted to play, I think. You go 0-3 — obviously, a lot of football left to be played — but 0-3 sounds a lot worse than 1-2. Morale is probably a lot lower when you're 0-3, so it's a big win for us. It was good to get on the board. I think we'll be able to put something together now.”

How do you build upon this now? Other than your physical recovery, where are you looking to improve upon this win?

“We'll continue to have great practices. We have to be better in the passing game, better in the run game. We have to be better in all facets of the offense. We can't have that many pre-snap penalties. So, communication this week will be key, especially going on the road. So, we have to have a great week of practice all around.”

TREY HENDRICKSON

Defensive end

Zac Taylor said positive energy and momentum can come from a win like this. Is that real?

“Momentum is very real in football. I think it's something you can build off of and that's something we plan on doing as we get ready for the (Tennessee) Titans.”

How were you able to generate so much pressure as a defensive line tonight?

“Sacks are a team stat. Our defensive backs were playing well, our linebackers were balling as well — we forced two (interceptions) and Logan (Wilson) picked them off. It's one of those things where the defensive backs were getting sacks. Dax Hill did a great job blitzing off the edge — I think everybody on our front had a sack as well — Sam (Hubbard), DJ (Reader), BJ (Hill) — so credit to them as well. I can't rush by myself. (We played) good defensive ball and I'm really happy to have the win.”

Of your pressures, which was your favorite or best play in your view?

“We'll look at the tape. There's a lot of corrections I need to (make); I should have been generating pressure earlier. There's a lot for me to correct. That's something I look forward to doing.”

The six sacks were the most under defensive coordinator Lou Anarumo. Do you guys take pride in a number like that?

“I think he put us all in good situations, and fortunately for us, we can build on it because we have a lot we need to correct. There's more out there — more we could have done, and continuing that next week is important.”

JA'MARR CHASE

Wide receiver

How happy were you to have your first big game of the season pulling in over 100 yards receiving?

“I'm not really thinking about it like that. I'm a team player, man. I'm really happy we're winning. When we lose, I hate it. But when we win, I'm all for it.”

Are there specific things you think you to work on to keep things moving forward positively?

“Yeah, execution, being on the same page as (far as) the snap count — small things — and no penalties. (We need to work on) the small things so we don't get ourselves screwed up in the game.”

What was the toughest part about the way the season started?

“Just playing in that weather (in Cleveland). That was the worst — I'm not going to lie ... We just faced adversity the first two weeks. And Baltimore got the best of us that game (last week), and you're going to get that sometimes. It's the NFL, and you've got to just bounce back — come back the next time, ready and prepared.”

Is there more hunger to want to keep this going following tonight's win?

“We're already hungry. We've just got to make sure our execution is good. Other than that, we're going to be OK.”

How good did it feel to have a couple explosive plays tonight?

“It was good to just get the offense going — get the team going. That's what I'm here to do. I just do my job.”

Seeing Burrow throw the ball over 40 times ... how much does that mean to him, knowing you've got his back — and to you, knowing the ball would be in the air tonight?

“That's how we've got to be — have each other's backs. I think that's why our bond is so strong and our chemistry is so good. We just have to make sure we're on the same page, and me being there for him at all moments is the reason why we're so good.”

JOE MIXON

Running back

How badly did you as a team need this win tonight?

“We needed it bad, as a unit (and) as a whole team. It was ugly (in) the first half, but we got it together and came out with the win, (which) is most important. It's a great feeling to have.”

Describe your touchdown run ...

“Pretty much, I got a double-team up to the linebacker and they blocked it well. I headed back side, cut it back and just outran the safety and ran in for the touchdown.”

What does it mean to the team that Joe Burrow gutted it out and played tonight?

“It was a great thing to show his grit, will and want-to to play with us on this Monday night, and to come through and deliver.”

What was going on with you emotionally when you scored tonight on such a big stage for the city and the team?

“It felt great. (It's) Monday night with everybody watching, and to be able what we do day-in, day-out is a great feeling. The crowd was electric, and everybody was hyped on the team, so it was a great feeling, man.”

Six sacks, two takeaways for the defense against a really great offense — what did you think of their performance?

“Man, they played their asses off. It was great football. All of those guys were hyped up. They were playing with energy and it was all will and want-to. I was happy they were getting to the quarterback and they all were looking damn good, so I'm happy for them.”

LOGAN WILSON

Linebacker

What did it mean when Joe Burrow answered the bell and played in this game?

“He understands the importance of it. That’s the type of guy that you want leading this team and this organization. That’s why they pay him the big bucks.”

I’m hesitant to use the word must-win at this time of the year because it’s early and a lot can happen, but would you say it was an important and critical win?

“Yes, absolutely. You always want to get back in the win column. You don’t want to go 0-3 to start the season. Your chances of getting into the playoffs, obviously, are pretty slim. We understood that and we kind of viewed this as a game we needed to win anyway in front of our home crowd.”

The Rams’ offense got off to a great start this season. To hold them down to the extent that you did, it’s pretty remarkable ...

“We had a good game plan all week — best week of practice going in — and we were able to execute.”

What does it feel like to get not one interception, but two in one game?

“I’m blessed being in the right place at the right time and taking advantage of those opportunities when they come to you, because they’re rare in this league. I’m big on, as many times that we can get the ball back to our offense, the better off we’re going to be.”

There’s still some defensive back in you, isn’t there?

“Yeah, it’s never going to leave me.”

What did you think of your team’s pass rush tonight?

“They were getting after him (Matthew Stafford), and that’s what you want to do against a quarterback like that. If you allow him to set his feet, he’ll pick you apart. Our D-line did a heck of a job tonight.”

ORLANDO BROWN JR.

Offensive tackle

How does it feel after an 0-2 start to get a win?

“It all feels great to get in the win column. I still feel like there’s a ton of room for us to get better, especially offensively up front. It feels great to get back in that win column. We’ve just got to be consistent in our preparation as we move forward.”

What did you think of the offensive line play tonight, allowing only six hits on Joe Burrow?

“That’s a really good defensive front. They have a first-ballot Hall of Famer on that defense. It’s a dogfight every single week out there. It’s a pass-first league, just not the easiest thing for an offensive lineman to do. But this is a group of men, guys that really love the game. They love to prepare and protect Joe (Burrow) and all those things that come with it. I’ve been impressed with what we have.”

Talk about your boy Joe Mixon getting the touchdown.

“Oh man, it was a great feeling. Any time you can get those 20-plus yard runs and they’re touchdowns, it’s a great feeling. I was real happy to see that.”

TED KARRAS

Center

You guys were battling in the trenches tonight. How does it feel to come out with a win?

“A win is a win and we’re feeling great. We’re going to enjoy it tonight. We’ve got a short week. We’re going to Tennessee to get back to even. Thought we did a good job overall, but a little bit sloppy. You want to score more than 19 points with this offense. I thought overall that we did a really good job corralling 99 (Aaron Donald) but gave him a few — that can happen sometimes. Overall we battled and won the game.”

All week long it seemed like all we heard was Aaron Donald, but you held them to just six hits. What are your thoughts on what held you back from getting more points?

“Penalties, just not finishing drives. You’d like to do a little bit better. And 19 points, I think that’s a little bit sloppy for us. We owe a higher standard than that. I think six hits is too many with this unit. Obviously, that’s a special player over there. We did enough to win, corralling him, but there’s a few plays when we look back that we could have done some better things.”

There’s a saying that it’s never as good as you think it is, or never as bad as you think it is. What are your thoughts on that?

“That is very true. It’s never as good, never as bad. We’re going to learn from some things. We’re going to have another great D-tackle we’re going against this week in (Jeffery) Simmons. Obviously, a different style. Aaron Donald is the best interior lineman since Alex Karras. But good enough to win, we’re going to enjoy it. It feels good to get that off our back, and really just proud of the guys. Proud of Joe Burrow — what a maniac he is going out there and gritting out a win on a hurt calf. We’re going to get back and watch it Wednesday, then head down to Nashville for another AFC gritty game.”

What were your thoughts on the cutback touchdown by Joe Mixon?

“It was nice to just run it in. That ultimately ended up winning the game for us. It was high execution on everyone’s part. We needed to get into the end zone. Field goals weren’t going to cut it today. Thank goodness we got it done.”



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SEPT. 25, 2023

L.A. RAMS AT CINCINNATI

SEAN McVAY

Head coach

Initial comments ...

"Congratulations to Cincinnati for being able to get it done. There were opportunities early on that we just weren't able to capitalize on, whether it was red zone possessions where you get some good momentum early on in that game and you realize the margin for error. The two turnovers obviously really hurt us. The communication error and then we're late over the middle, they end up making a nice play. And then after we hit the 46-yarder, we were in positive momentum. We had that blitz picked up that we were sliding to that, and he ended up stopping and being able to get a tip. Those are some tough things. We weren't good enough on third down. You lose Alaric Jackson, that was tough. But to me, the narrative of the game was I loved the way that our defense played, I thought they were relentless. I thought special teams did a nice job. There were just some opportunities that we'll be able to learn from, and whether it's figuring out how do we communicate, how do we handle some of the different things that they were presenting. You give credit to Cincinnati, but there were a lot of things that that we did anticipate, and we've got to be able to figure out, how do we execute at a better level? How do we continue to provide clarity to our guys? There are certain things that were unfortunate about tonight, but the situational ball that we've been pretty good in offensively, was not good at all tonight, and that ended up really hurting us."

What did you see on Tutu Atwell's touchdown that was called back?

"I'm not too worried about it. I didn't even see it, I just know they said we've got to be ready to go on the three-yard line if they ended up calling it back. They made that decision. Then we've got to be able to go. Taking a sack on first down really hurt us. We had an opportunity on the screen on second down where there was a lot of people out in front and then even had a chance on the third down. That was an unfortunate sequence to settle for three right there, especially when you feel like he scores. You get some explosives. But that's the NFL and you've got to be able to figure out how to eliminate those things and capitalize on those opportunities."

When Alaric Jackson goes out, is there any conversation about kicking Joe Noteboom, because he's played left tackle in the league, out to the left side?

"Yeah, you could talk about that. Zach Thomas had done a really good job with a lot of the repetitions that he had gotten and felt like making a two-man switch wasn't in the best interest, we'll look at the tape and figure out if that's something that we want to do moving forward if Alaric is out for an extended period of time."

In terms of adjusting, when you see a young left tackle that's thrown into the game, and things are happening, he's getting hit and all that, what's the adjustment conversation like getting him help?

"Yeah, there are, but they're doing a lot of different things where you do need to be able to use all five eligibles. There'll certainly be some things that we can look at and wish I did better. There were some opportunities for us to be able to make some plays, and to try to be able to get through some of those downs, but that's certainly something that I definitely need to be able to look at."

Going just one of 11 on third down, were they giving you guys different looks?

"No, they did a nice job, but they were fairly in alignment with what we kind of expected. It was just execution. There was a couple of things where they were able to apply some pressure. We ended up getting some conversions, but then you end up getting penalties that take you out of it, and now you're way behind the sticks and almost just trying to say, 'Let's just give ourselves some room for a punt.' There was a handful of those. Again, there'll be a lot of things that we can learn from this tape, and that's coaches and players alike."

At the start of the season, you talked a lot about wanting to make sure that there was run-pass balance and dimension. But even when things were even, you still skewed pretty pass heavy. Was it something they were doing?

"Yeah, there's a lot of different things that we do. There are certain things where you do want to be able to run the football and then there's other times when there's better advantageous looks to be able to get off some of the things that we did. That's what we'll look at. There were some favorable opportunities that unfortunately, we weren't able to capitalize on. Sometimes you have sequences where you are trying to call run, and they'll give you a structure that enables you to be able to get into different plays, whether that be throwing it or another run, and that was something that came up tonight."

Despite some of your struggles on offense, you guys stayed in the game and looked like you were in striking distance. Did you ever feel like you guys were on the cusp?

"Yeah, you did. There was you know, I thought so after Ahkello's (Witherspoon) pick. Again, there was an opportunity where you convert then you get a penalty and you move yourself back. There was a lot of self-inflicted wounds. I say that, but you do give them credit. I don't want to take away the credit that they deserve for some of the different things that they created like confusion, and they had a great crowd tonight. But I thought there was a lot of things, especially early on, that when you look at it you say are we really given the clarity, how quickly can some of these guys be able to learn on the fly, how can we help Matthew (Stafford) out and I'm excited to be able to look at this tape. Yes, it did feel like we were in striking distance. I thought the defense kept us in the game the whole night. I thought it was really unfortunate, especially early on, where we had to settle field goals where we had some of the looks and some of the opportunities to be able to execute and we just weren't able to get it done."

After the Bengals took the lead, you managed just 11 plays over the next four drives. Did you sense the offense getting frustrated, unable to sustain anything?

"Yeah, there was frustration and a lot of that stuff was they did a good job, being able to convert some third downs, stay on the field and then we weren't able to. We weren't good enough on third downs and you're right off the field. There was a lot of things that just weren't good enough tonight. A lot of things that we can learn from. This is a long season. Fortunately for us, we get a chance to be able to learn on a short week and be able to get an opportunity to go compete against Indianapolis this week."

With those injuries, particularly on the offensive line, and a short week, and traveling back to Indianapolis, are you concerned at all about being able to recover in time?

"I think what we'll do is we'll look and we'll figure out exactly what the extent of those guys' injuries are, and then we'll be able to adjust and adapt accordingly. That's what we have to be able to do."

Going against a defensive coordinator like Lou Anarumo, you guys obviously knew and talked about coming in that he's going to throw a lot of different looks at you and you've got to be able to adjust. Did you feel that you guys, coaches and players, did enough of that type of adjusting when you saw?

"Yeah, that's where I certainly know that I can always do a better job. I'll be the first to look inward. There was a handful of situations early on where they gave us things that we did expect and anticipate, and we didn't quite get it communicated on some of the other opportunities that we did have and that was collectively. You got to look at yourself and say, are we providing the clarity? Why did we have some of those mistakes that occurred? Whether it ended up being a turnover or not converting on some third downs. Those are all things that you want to be able to do as good a

job as we can of trying to put our players through it. There were a couple mixers, but for the most part, credit to Lou and their defense, they did an excellent job executing. There's certainly some things that we can collectively do a better job on our end, but it was fairly in alignment with what we thought."

What are some of the troubles of adjusting real time to losing and starting left tackle?

"It's tough because you're playing from behind. They were doing a lot of different things that limited some of the things that we were able to activate. You become a little bit more regulated in terms of the inventory. You're trying to be able to figure it out on the fly and they did a nice job being able to present."

MATTHEW STAFFORD

Quarterback

Did you think Tutu Atwell got it on his touchdown?

"I never saw a replay. But, I trust whatever they saw, they saw. I never saw it."

Matthew, what are the challenges of adjusting in your own time when you lose a starting left tackle? And for a period of time also, you're starting right guard as well?

"Yeah that's part of it. I thought they both stepped in and played well. I think the biggest thing for us tonight was missed opportunities early in the game in the red zone. Obviously, if we can come away with some sevens there, it's probably a little bit different game later on. Obviously, turnovers, miscommunication on one of the protections and then the other one — I'm throwing it to where it needs to go, and Mike Hilton read out of his pressure because we had him picked up — and sometimes those things happen — (and then a) tip goes to the other team. We just (need to) keep playing on those. But those are times where we lost points. So, I thought our defense played great. Great play by Ahkello (Witherspoon) late to get that ball back for us. But, we didn't do enough on offense, especially early in the game, to give ourselves a little bit of a lead there."

One of eleven on third downs. Everyone's a different story, obviously. Overall, what happened?

"It's just execution ... comes down to that. Obviously we put ourselves in some tough spots. Had some third-and-extra-longs. Didn't do a good enough job there. I'd have to go back and watch all of them for you. But, we just didn't execute. Throwing and catching is the name of the game on third down. We didn't do that well enough."

In the red zone, did you guys feel like you were in a balanced plan?

"Yeah, that was pretty similar, as far as runs to passes, as it is most weeks. Wish I would have either cut that one loose to Van or thrown it out of the back of the end zone on the first drive of the game. Just to stay in normal downs to help us out there. I had a shot on the one to Tutu (Atwell) in the back of the end zone. I thought he got tugged a little bit and almost came down with that one on the second drive. It's just the name of the game in the NFL. Missed opportunities. And if you don't get them, then, obviously you let a good team like them stay in the game, especially early on. It's going to be tough to hold them off."

How do you feel even with your guys struggling on offense. Did you ever feel like things were turning — that you guys could get into a rhythm?

"Yeah, there were times. The big play to Van, it felt like we were jumping the ball. 'Let's go' tempo, 'let's get them.' Knew what pressure they were bringing in. Got it picked up on the next play — tip-picked. It was kind of one of those deals where we'd have some nice plays and then, for one reason or another, we'd go backwards there for a little bit. So we just have to ... everybody look inward obviously. It's early on in the season. Just find a way to get better and move on. And obviously we have a short week, so nothing better than that. Just get back out there and go play again against a good Indy team."

After the Bengals took the lead and managed just 11 plays over the next four drives, was there any frustration at not being able to sustain the offense?

"Well, yeah, absolutely. You definitely want to be out there. Defense is playing as good as they're playing. We're staying in the game. Got a chance to win it. Nobody's happy-go-lucky, sitting over there on the sideline, when we're not executing the way that we can. Everybody is just pulling in the same direction, trying to be as good as we can, and trying to get better and go from there."

Sean said that part of the reason why Zach wasn't getting a ton of help — the further the game went — was because of what you guys needed to do with the other eligibles on the field. Can you expand on that?

"Yeah, we kind of had to catch up a little bit there. So we were just trying to get as many guys out in the protection or out in the passing game as we could. We'll take a look at that and we'll see what those guys' injuries are — see how they're feeling — and move forward from there. But I was impressed that the guys stepped up and with the way they played."

AHKELLO WITHERSPOON

Cornerback

How did it feel for the defense to have to keep going out there with the offense struggling to put together some drives?

"Yeah, we've got to be better as a team. We can do that much better defensively to help them out, but at a certain point it's just about us doing our jobs. We've got to make more plays, and just be whatever is needed on that Sunday to help complement our offense."

Did you feel at the end of the second half the frustration from that?

"No. we love to play ball — whatever happens. After a touchdown, field goal, turnover, punt, we just go out there and line it up. We're blind to the moment. That's the way you play good defense."

On that interception you literally took it away. Were you thinking that in the moment to get some momentum?

"No, I really thought it was going to be an easier pick, and then I felt him kind of coming to be the aggressor, just because of the angle of it. He didn't really want to give it up. So then once he kind of grabbed it, I just kind of ripped it out and got my hand in there."

When you got that pick did you feel like that was going to give you momentum?

"Absolutely, I mean that's what we were preaching — get the ball back. They were in field goal range. Three points right there kills us, so we just tried to hold them and get the ball back."

Sean McVay just spoke to how well the defense has played. Bottom line is a loss is a loss. What's the feeling of being so close, yet so far?

"I'm going to say that we've got to be better. We can't worry about what the offense is doing. If there's a day that they struggle, that just means we've got to be that much better. We've been good, but we can definitely play better, play smarter, and just make more plays to help the whole team."

Any learning opportunities you took away from this game?

"I would say just learning that we're a good group. It's just continuing to believe it, and put it on tape each week, and areas to improve is just being a better defense. That's the name of the game, and that's going to be our focus this week."

AARON DONALD

Defensive tackle

What was your impression of how the defense performed tonight?

"I've got to watch the film to see, but I feel like we did some good things. Obviously, some things we want back, but that's the nature of the game. But I've got to watch the film to see."

What was your sense of how Joe Burrow was playing? Was he as mobile as ever or kind of rooted to one spot?

“He really wasn’t moving too much. He would stand still, and just get the ball out quick. He made some good throws. I feel like we could have gotten some more pressure on him at times, because he wasn’t moving, and just standing still in the pocket. I’ve got to watch the film to see what happened, and go from there.”

Second week in a row, so close, but yet so far. How do you keep motivated?

“Just keep working. It’s early, just three games into the season. Obviously, we fell short. Got to watch the film and get better. It’s a long season, so we can’t allow this to affect you next week, and the week after that. We’ve got to keep playing week in and week out.”

How did you feel personally about how you played with your first solo sack of the season?

“Felt good. Felt like I got some opportunities, some one-on-ones here and there. Wish I would’ve had some more, but I’ve got to watch the film and see.”

Can you take us through your first sack?

“I think they called a poker. I felt like I could’ve beat them inside, took the inside move, and the center came late, just beat him and made the play.”

You had a big hit on Joe Burrow late in the game. Did you feel like he was going to get up and come back from that?

“I don’t know. I was just trying to play the game, play fast, and do my job.”

ERNEST JONES

Linebacker

How did you feel Joe Burrow played?

“He just wasn’t moving the way he normally moves, and we just used that as opportunities for us to rush, and get after him, but he did a good job of getting the ball out of his hands quick, and putting the ball where it needed to be.”

In the second quarter, they started sending you on more blitzes and designing more pressure looks to try to get that going. Did you notice a change in the middle part of the game the way you guys were getting pressure?

“Yeah, we were getting pressure whether they were sending me or not, honestly. That just adds an effect where the back has to block me. I did a great job of beating him multiple times, but Joe Burrow was getting the ball out, and making smart decisions whether it was incomplete or a complete pass. He did a great job just getting the ball out.”

He was getting the ball out quick on those slight react plays. I know those are a point of pride for you guys, but what happened on those tonight?

“I’ll have to go back and watch the film. I can’t really recall right now — just a lot of different emotions, but yeah, they were finding the holes in the coverage. On defense you can’t cover everything, so they were just finding those spots, and just putting the ball where it needed to be.”

Going into the short week on another road trip, do you like where the defense is sitting right now?

“Yes and no. We’ve had our great moments, and we’ve had some not-so-good moments. Getting those bad moments out of the way, and we’ll continue to get better like I know about these guys. We’ll go back and work, and get ready to go get a win against Indianapolis.”