



## BENGALS POSTGAME QUOTES

SEPT. 17, 2023

BALTIMORE AT CINCINNATI

### ZAC TAYLOR

#### Head coach

##### What do you feel told the story of the game today?

"Turnover battle, 1-0. Every time we play them, that's what it comes down to."

##### How would you assess this performance?

"I thought our guys fought. This is exactly the game we knew we would get. They got the ball first, leading 17-14 at the half, but were in great shape coming out of the half with the ball. Then Geno Stone made a great play with the pick. He did a good job holding backside, cheating post-snap. Then they hit an explosive play. That's the way it goes when you play these guys. I told our team, 'This is the type of game you store away and learn from.' You win more games down the road because of what we went through today. There's nothing discouraging about how our team played. You want to come out with a win, especially at home in front of our tremendous crowd, but it is what it is. We're 0-2 right now and get a chance to bounce back on Monday Night Football."

##### How do you think Joe Burrow looked today?

"I thought he looked great. I thought he was poised; the protection was unbelievable up front. Those guys do a great job holding coverages as long as anyone we've played against. I thought he saw it really well. He did a good job efficiently leading us."

##### Would he have gone back in for a final series, if needed?

"That was the plan."

##### What can you do to get the offense in sync earlier in the game?

"We had a holding call right out of the gate. We had a first down, a holding call — now it's second-and-14. Then we had a great play on the third down, and then we're out of bounds. I think in sync is the wrong term there. If you really assess what was going on, I thought we were in good shape. They got us on a second-and-10. They threw a bubble, and it got us in third-and-10 and we couldn't convert. Outside of two plays on the first two drives, the next five drives we drove down the field for a field goal, touchdown, interception, and then touchdown. It felt like we were finding our rhythm there offensively."

##### Has Joe's health limited the playbook at all?

"I thought this week we were in really great shape."

##### How hard is it to contain Lamar Jackson?

"He's very difficult, then you put on top (of that) all of the weapons they have. They have an elite skill group — an elite tight end, great running backs too. It's built to be tough and explosive. They do a great job."

##### Tee Higgins had some nice catches today ...

"I thought our guys responded really well. Last week was a challenging week for receivers with the rain. Things don't go your way and you don't get opportunities with the way the game got away from us. I thought our guys did a great job this week, getting ready for their number to be called and stepping up when it did. The Ravens do a good job trying to roll up to Jamarr Chase sometimes, and I thought Tee Higgins and Tyler Boyd stepped up when needed to and made some big plays for us."

##### Does the 0-2 start last year give you hope for next week?

"The beauty of this team is we know it's a 17-game season. There's no overreaction on our end. We have to be prepared for stuff outside our locker room, which is natural. We're in a very difficult division. We would have loved to come out 2-0; 1-1 would have been fine too. This is exactly where we were last year, and this team is only going to get better with every game that passes. When you stumble early, you have to learn from it. So many years in the past, we've learned from early-season losses that have propelled us in November and December. This will be no different. I'm very confident in that."

##### How frustrating is it to start 0-2?

"It's not what we want. There are a lot of really positive things that happened today against a really good football team. We've lost to two teams now that will be there down the stretch, but we get them again, just like last year. It is important to turn the page, because it's always a new team and a new year. But there's a lot we can take from last year that will help us going forward."

##### Are you pleased with the third down progress?

"It was better than (last week's) two for 15."

##### Did you think Joe saw Stone on that interception?

"I saw what he saw. Stone did a good job holding on the snap, and then when Joe's eyes came, he popped over. It's a veteran safety making a good play."

##### How are you able to evaluate the defense's performance against the rush?

"They got 40-something carries and do a good job leaning on the run game when they need to. They get a 10-point lead there at one point, then a lead at the end. They did a good job. They have good personnel you have to honor, then the skill guys obviously. Their quarterback is difficult because you have to rush him differently. It creates a whole new list of opportunities for them."

##### How do you feel Lamar played?

"To my eye, he played really well."

### **Was the lack of pressure on him by design?**

"It's a challenge. There are pressures there where he's elite with his movement skills. Some quarterbacks, the pressure would be there and affect him. For him, he just skips around it and is able to move on. You have to rush him differently. He does such a good job in the pocket. He's one of the best passers in the league, and combined with his rushing skills, he makes it difficult."

### **It was another big crowd, what can you say to them?**

"Stay patient with us. I know that's hard to say and listen to. They want wins, there's a lot of excitement going into this season. We have a lot of excitement, and we still do. It's Sept. 17, and we plan on this being a long season. We'll be excited to make corrections, put this one behind us, and have an electric Monday Night Football crowd as we've had here."

### **Do you need to evaluate any big changes?**

"I feel like we're in great shape. We got some good performances from guys. There are some things we can correct and adjust, then continue to move forward."

## **JOE BURROW**

### **Quarterback**

#### **Overall, how do you feel like you and the offense performed today?**

"Not well enough to win. Now we'll go watch the tape. We did some really good things, some things we can clean up too."

#### **What happened with the calf at the end of that play?**

"Tweaked it a little bit again, we'll see where it is tomorrow."

#### **Could you have come back out and played?**

"Yeah, I was going to come back out."

#### **Did you feel like you gained any momentum in the second half? The second half you were getting some good drives and eventually scored ...**

"Yeah, we moved the ball well the whole game. First half, we had three possessions and then we had a holding call that took us back. When you have one of those, it kind of derails the drive and then we had a third down and we didn't convert. Then, we scored points on the other one. Second half, looking back, we moved it really well, it came down to the turnover in the red zone. When you're playing that team you can't have that mistake, because they're going to run it well. They're going to keep it away from you. They're going to score points. Lamar (Jackson) is a great player. He's going to make plays, so you've got to take advantage of all your red zone opportunities and that was my mistake."

#### **What did you see on that good play by the safety?**

"A really good play by him, good disguise. But I've got to see that."

#### **There's going to be plenty of talk about your calf. Is that something that you're going to have to weigh in, not thinking on a week-to-week basis. Do you let yourself think about long term?**

"We're going to have to wait and see. I'm not sure how it's going to feel the next couple of days. It's pretty sore right now, but no telling how it's going to feel so I think we're going to take it day by day."

#### **How did you tweak it?**

"It was on the play before the last touchdown."

#### **What changed this week about your chemistry with Tee Higgins compared to last week?**

"I don't think anything really changed. Me and Tee are always on the same page. You're going to have bad games like last week, that's going to happen in the league. It's all about how you respond to them. We didn't win the game today, but we build momentum and we got to build on that."

#### **Since you hurt your calf, I know you have had good days and bad days. Has it felt like it does now on any of those bad days or is this different?**

"Again, it's tough to tell. You have some of those days, but it's hard to give you guys an answer on that until the next couple of days. I'll give it a couple nights and a couple sleeps. We'll go from there."

#### **Last year this team started 0-2. What gives you the faith and confidence that this year can be just as good?**

"We've done it before. Obviously, you don't want to start 0-2, it's not what we're planning on, not what you want to do at all. But now we're going to bounce back, that's what we do it's all there is to it."

#### **Do you see or feel any difference on the team between this year's 0-2 and last year's at this point?**

"No, we just didn't play well enough to win either of these games. We've got to find ways to make those plays down the stretch to win these kinds of games. Every time you play an AFC North team, it's going to look like that. You're going to have seven possessions, so you're going to have to make the most of them."

#### **Do you see any commonalities in the way that you started this year and last year that may be the reason you have started 0-2 in the last couple years?**

"Well, when your quarterback misses camp, it's tough to start fast. So, it's not an ideal situation."

#### **It looked like over the course of the game, you got more comfortable, and the second half was far more efficient than first half.**

"I know the stats in the first half are what everybody looks at and they weren't great. But like I said, the first two possessions we had that holding call, I have to watch the film and see if I think it's holding, I don't know. Then we had the third down that we didn't convert and then we moved the ball really well on the third possession, so I think we did some good things in that first half too, obviously stats weren't great, but second half, I thought we were rolling. Like I said, you can't have a red zone turnover against that team. That was on me."

#### **You came back from that turnover on the next drive and had a touchdown. It seemed to be the turning point the last time you**

**had that ball ...**

“Yeah, I felt pretty comfortable all day. O-Line did a great job. I had a ton of time back there. That's a really good defense. They play to their strengths. They've got really good players. They've got safeties that know how to disguise. So, it's always a challenge when you play them.”

**I think it was early in the third quarter when you jumped to miss a defender and then ran out of pocket. First time we've really seen that. Did that do anything confidence-wise for you?**

“Yeah, that felt great and obviously, I tweaked it again. So, we'll just have to reevaluate the next couple of days.”

**You had not just slow starts but even going back to 2021 you had a stretch where you dropped a couple straight games. What's the biggest key to making sure that you can bounce back the way you need to in order to get to where you want to go?**

“Have great practices. We had a great week of practice last week. We've got to build on that, go back, watch tape, make the corrections, and then and then build on that in practice. That's where you get better. So, we've got to have a great practice this week and we've got to have great practices going forward.”

**Is this the first time you tweaked the calf since originally injuring it?**

“Whenever you have these kinds of things, it's always ongoing. It's always something that you're managing. Like I said, I don't know how I'm going to feel the next couple of days. We'll have to wait and see.”

**Are you concerned that it's going to be something you have to manage all year?**

“I don't know. It's tough to tell. It's tough to look into the future and see that. I'm doing everything I can to get healthy and get that thing the way I need to so I can go out and perform the way I need to win. We'll see.”

**Last year you were confident after starting 0-2 that you guys were going to be able to work through some things. How would you describe how you feel right now knowing that you're 0-2 but you also now are dealing with injury?**

“Yeah, I'm still confident. I feel really confident in all the guys we have in that room. Like I said, we're going to have to see how that calf feels the next couple of days. I don't know how it's going to feel. We'll see.”

**Last year, fast starts were such a theme. After the 0-2 start, you guys wanted to start fast, and that was kind of a point of emphasis. Will it be that again?**

“Yeah. I think we always want to start fast. Teams play us soft, keep everything in front. I think we did a good job of taking what they gave us today. But if you start fast, teams think twice about playing that way. So, we've got to start fast”

**Are teams covering Ja'Marr Chase any differently and in the future do you think you might try to get him more involved early with jet-sweeps, bubble screens, things like that?**

“Yeah, I think we threw him a couple today. We'll go watch the film and check it out. It's tough to tell from just sitting here and not having watched the tape. We'll go back and reevaluate that. We need to get him involved. He's our best player on offense, so we need to find a way to get him off.”

## **TEE HIGGINS**

### **Wide receiver**

**In the second half, did you feel a rhythm was starting with Joe Burrow passing for over 190 yards?**

“I think so. It definitely started coming, but as you know, a little too late. We've got to get that rhythm early, especially against a team like that. It came a little too late.”

**The Ravens put a lot of pressure on you to do something with your possessions because they don't give you many with their whole thing to play keep away. If you get three or four possessions a half, it's a big deal, isn't it?**

“Yeah, for sure, man. They held the ball quite an amount of time and that obviously hurt. Our defensive was getting stops, but we just weren't capitalizing. You've got play complimentary football, and it showed.”

**How about Charlie Jones getting that punt return touchdown?**

“Super proud of him. We've been talking since he got here. We needed a return for six, and he gave us one today — gave us a spark, and (we're) proud of him.”

## **MIKE HILTON**

### **Cornerback**

**Zac Taylor was just talking about you all understood the expectations of this team, but you also understand that it's a long season. With a 0-2 start, how is that sitting in this room?**

“It's a little frustrating, especially with it being two division losses. Our No. 1 goal is to win our division, and we've kind of put ourselves in a hole. Like I said, we've been here before, and we've got to find a way to dig each other out of it and get a win next Monday.”

**Everyone is trying to diagnose why this team is not playing to the level you guys expect to play. What's your thoughts on that?**

“We're not finishing plays when we need to. Defensively, we're not getting off the field on third down. We didn't get any turnovers today. It's just one of those games that we weren't able to finish.”

**So what is the mood of the room? Is it frustration, is it anger? What do you take from it?**

“Just mixed emotions. Obviously, it's a tough game. Like I said — (it was) a division opponent, and you want to win your division. We can't dwell on it. We've got a good Monday night game coming against the Rams, and we just have to find a way to get our first 'W.'”

**Can you pinpoint what happened today on third downs?**

“Just Lamar (Jackson), and they kept themselves in third-and-manageable. They're winning first and second downs, so third down is third-and-three, third-and-two — some easy third downs. Cut throat time, you know? Lamar kept the ball in his hands and was able to make plays with his legs.”

### **How do you think this team will respond?**

“Oh, we’re going to bounce back. We have no choice. That’s who we are in this locker room. We believe in each other. Like I said, we just get this first win and that will definitely get things rolling.”

## **TED KARRAS**

### **Center**

#### **How important is to focus on the next game and what you have to do week in, week out versus dwelling on today’s loss?**

“We have a Monday night game coming up (in) primetime. We’ve been here before. (It’s) not an ideal start, but one thing my old coach Dante Scarnecchia used to say (is), ‘Nothing can break my spirit.’ We’re going to attack each week with the same ferocity, the same energy. We’ve been here before like last year. It is what it is — that’s a patented AFC North bloodbath type of game and we came three points short. We made some mistakes but ultimately, we’re coming after the Rams next.”

#### **Head Coach Zac Taylor said there are a couple things you guys can lean into from starting 0-2 last year. What are they?**

“Obviously, it’s not ideal. We don’t want to start 0-2 but we’ve been here before and made it to the final four. Obviously, we have higher aspirations than that, but we’ve got to get it going. I thought we played a solid game. That’s an AFC North matchup right there; it’s going to come down to the last possessions and we came up short today. The main thing we can lean on is that we have experience being 0-2. We’re going to take our lumps but we’re going to come back tomorrow with great energy, come back Wednesday (and) get an extra day of preparation, an extra day of rest for a huge Monday night matchup against a good team (in) the Rams.”

#### **How would you evaluate the offense today?**

“When you play the Ravens, every possession is at a premium. Usually, an NFL game is about 10-11 possessions (for an offense) and the Ravens cut that down usually to about eight. So, we had the ball three times in the first half (that resulted in) two three-and-outs and got it going there and scored on the last one. I think we did some good things. We got it going in the second half. We don’t need to dip our toe in the water anymore — we need to dive right in and get some points right away. That’s a big part of our strategy, to score first, obviously. Our record is pretty good when we score first. (We need to) not dip our toe in the water, going down, (have a) 75-yard drive to start games and taking the lead right away.”

#### **How much are you crossing your fingers Joe Burrow is going to be okay?**

“I don’t know the details on what Joe’s going through. I think it puts a lot of onus on the offensive line to play close to perfect. If his mobility is lacking, we don’t want him to have to escape and move around too much. I thought we did a pretty decent job today. I thought we limited pressures (and) I thought the offensive line played a solid game — obviously not good enough to win — but we’re coming back. Joe’s our leader, Joe’s going to get it done for us and my whole goal is to just be my very best to not ever let him down.”

## **CHIDOBE AWUZIE**

### **Cornerback**

#### **What happened on the touchdown pass to Ravens wide receiver Nelson Agholor?**

“It was a great ball on his outside shoulder. I’m running with him — I’m getting ready to look back and I see his eyes are getting big (because) the ball’s coming. It was a great ball (but) on my part, I feel I could have anticipated it way better. I could have gotten there sooner. He gave me a look in the beginning where I kind of — it was third and short — and I was thinking, ‘He may do a short route,’ and he kind of burst out of there. I was still in good position but again, it was still a great pass and next time it happens, I’ll definitely be ready for that.”

#### **Lamar Jackson didn’t have a lot of rushing yards today, but it felt like when they needed him to get them, he did. That’s kind of what he does, no?**

“Yeah. He’s the MVP of their team for a reason. (He’s) one of the best players in our league and all the props to him. Obviously, we wish we would have tackled a little bit better but guys like that, you kind of have to know they’re going to extend plays and it’s going to take all 11 (of us), so we have to do a better job of getting to the ball when he does break loose.”

## **CHARLIE JONES**

### **Wide receiver**

#### **There was a penalty flag thrown during your punt return for a touchdown. Did you think it was coming back?**

“I did. I even gave the ball to the referee thinking it wasn’t going to be good, so I don’t even have the ball. It counted, so that’s all that mattered.”

#### **Several of your teammates have come up to congratulate you on your first NFL touchdown. Can you describe what that felt like?**

“They’ve been amazing this past week. They’ve been building me up, making sure I’m confident back there, encouraging me, telling me to keep doing my thing back there. They were definitely hyped up. A lot of the team effort this past week (was to help me) bounce back special teams-wise. They made every block possible for me to just run through.”

#### **There was one key block early in the return and then it just seemed like it was wide open down the sideline.**

“Yeah, it was wide open. They did a great job blocking and made my job pretty easy.”

#### **Does the end result of the game take some of the joy away?**

“Yeah, obviously the most important thing is getting the win and we didn’t get that. But I know this team is going to bounce back. We’re going to have a good week of practice and get in the film room and make our corrections. I don’t think anyone in here is worried at all.”



## RAVENS POSTGAME QUOTES

SEPT. 17, 2023

BALTIMORE AT CINCINNATI

### JOHN HARBAUGH (transcribed by Ravens)

#### Head coach

##### Initial comments ...

"We appreciate you guys being here. What a fantastic, Raven, team win — [a] rough, tough, physical, smart win, and a win with playmakers making plays that had to make plays. [I] just couldn't be more proud of those guys in this environment [on] opening day. The crowd was crazy, and the team we're playing — the [Cincinnati] Bengals — are outstanding. That's an awesome team win. I'm just proud of every single guy on the team — resiliency, tenacity, long drives, plays made when they had to be made, stops when they had to be made. [It was] just an outstanding effort and a great way to come in here to open up the AFC North trek that we're about to go on."

##### (on what it says about the Ravens when they still won the game despite missing five primary starters) ...

"It says a lot. It says a lot about the guys that played. It says that those guys are starting-caliber players that played winning football against a great football team in their house. That's what it says. They deserve it. Geno Stone just got a game ball, and he played great football. Pat Mekari had a great football game. Look at the way the offensive line played. [The] offensive line played a great football game. Pass protection was outstanding. Run blocking was outstanding — just all across the board. Pat was a great part of that, and Sam Mustipher stepped in, and he just played tremendously well. Of course, the corners. We pressed them. We got up there, and we pressed them, and we played well. They weren't hitting any fade [routes] on us. Our guys played fantastic out there on the edges. [I'm] just really proud of those guys — really proud of them."

##### (on QB Lamar Jackson's performance) ...

"I thought Lamar played great football. Lamar played winning football. When he got on rhythm early, he hit some passes and made some huge plays throwing the ball down the field. The play to Zay [Flowers] that started off the second half was as good as it gets, and Zay made a great catch. He gave his guy a chance and he made the play. He trusted his guy. Then of course what he did with his legs was a difference maker in the game. He does it. He just wants to win. Lamar wants to win. That's what Lamar's all about. He wants to win, and then he wants to help his teammates win. [I'm] just so impressed with his competitiveness and how he played today."

##### (on how fitting it was to end the game with RB Gus Edwards picking up the much-needed yards on 3rd down and 1 after the team rushed for 180 yards on the day) ...

"Yes, very fitting. That's Ravens football right there I would say. I think Ravens fans appreciate that play, and so does an old coach up in Ann Arbor, Michigan [John Harbaugh's father] Jack Harbaugh — power [run] to the right, power to the left, power to the right, power to the left. That's Jack Harbaugh football, and that's why we said in there, 'Who's got it better than us?' Well, what's the answer to, 'Who's got it better than us?' Nobody! It was just awesome. It was great. We love the power play."

##### (on QB Lamar Jackson's trust with WR Nelson Agholor in space on their touchdown connection early in the fourth quarter) ...

"I think that's a great observation. To me, that's exactly what it is. He's been practicing that. He was hitting it in practice. Those guys run great routes. Lamar put that thing right where it had to be, and 'Nelly' [Nelson Agholor] made a great catch. It's not the end of that. It's a big part of what we need to do — and they get up and get in your face and press you, we have to make them pay for it, and Lamar and Nelson did that."

##### (on any injury updates with WR Odell Beckham Jr. and OLB Odafe Oweh) ...

"I don't think it's serious injuries for either person. We'll learn more tomorrow, but I don't believe either one of those will be serious, as it looks right now."

### LAMAR JACKSON (transcribed by Ravens)

#### Quarterback

##### (on what it says about this team beating the defending AFC North champions) ...

"[It's] like I've been saying since camp — the sky is the limit for this team. All phases, I believe, we fought today how we're supposed to in tough game [against] the former division champs. [They're] a great team by the way, all phases as well. We just did what were supposed to do."

##### (on the touchdown throw to WR Nelson Agholor) ...

"I saw that it was mad coverage [and] 'Nelly' [Nelson Agholor] won [and] did a great job. [He] did a great route, kept his head down and dug for a few more yards and made a great catch."

##### (on if during the week he felt more comfortable with the offense) ...

"Yes, just from experience, just playing that first game ... Our first game was like a preseason game for us, especially the starters because we haven't played in a while together, but I feel like today, we stepped it up."

##### (on how rewarding it was for them to close the game out without having to bring the defense back out) ...

"Yes, I feel like it was great because previous years, we've been finishing with our defense on the field, and we really haven't been doing a good job at finishing the last drive for our defense and our special teams. And today, we did."

##### (on what this early season win means for the team in this division) ...

"To me, it doesn't mean anything yet. That's just two wins in a 17-game season. So, we have to stay focused and get ready for our next opponents. We can do well today on this victory, but other than that, we have to stay locked in because it's not a championship game."

##### (on if he paid attention at all to the preseason hype of Bengals being AFC North favorites this season) ...

"No, I was pretty much focused on us and getting focused with this offense, this new offense, and just getting back with my guys and focusing on what we have to focus on."

##### (on how much more comfortable he felt this week compared to last week) ...

"Absolutely. Our offensive line blocked their tails off. [The] guys were getting open, so it made my decision making way faster. I just have to put the ball where it needs to be and let those guys do what they do."

##### (on WR Zay Flowers seizing the moment when given the chance) ...

"We saw it together. They went Cover Zero when he was open on a post [route], and I had to get the ball out of my hands, but the [offensive] line did a great job. Just watching film knowing what they were going to do, we had to cross the route and I saw the safety driving on that cross route and Zay [Flowers], he's going to get away from corners. They have explosive guys, fast guys, I just had to give him a chance, and he made a heck of a catch."

(on if a game like this shows that you need everyone on this team and not just the starters) ...

"Yes, absolutely. We're going to need everyone. We showed that today. Everyone touching the ball, getting yards after the catch, [and] keeping the chains moving. We're going to need everyone. [I'm] praying that everyone stays healthy, and we just stay locked in."

(on if his wrist is OK) ...

"That little run? I'm good. I have like a little stinger in my arm, my hand, but I'm good."

## **NELSON AGHOLOR**

### **Wide receiver**

**Take us through that touchdown catch from Lamar Jackson ...**

"L. (Lamar Jackson) threw a great ball, coach called a great play. Easy as that."

**How big was that to you — your first touchdown as a Raven?**

"Big. Big play, and we practiced that. We hit it in practice, and now it comes to life."

**We've talked about how everyone in this offense is capable of having big moments, and today was an example of that. What does it show about this team that it can be different guys stepping up each week?**

"It just shows that we have a great group of guys who are talented, and also guys that are well prepared to seize the moment."

**Did you sort of feel the offense hitting its rhythm during this week of practice?**

"Yeah, I really felt that our level of focus, and the effort which we practiced with, was going to result in a quality performance."

**How much of a difference maker is Lamar Jackson?**

"Oh, he's different. Like, he's different. I've always watched him extend plays, and move around a lot and survey the field — and he does a great job. I don't know many quarterbacks who can go through all those full progressions as quick as he does. I'm happy to be on his team."

## **ROQUAN SMITH**

### **Linebacker**

**How does it feel winning a big division game coming in a bit short-handed?**

"Well, first off, I didn't think we were short-handed. I've got all the faith in the guys that stepped out on the field. It's an amazing victory coming in here. I think those guys talk a lot ... you take that stuff personally. But it was a great win for this team, and I'm just excited to be able to head back to Baltimore on the plane, relax with the feet kicked up with a nice 'dub.'"

**What does kind of 'exercising the demons' from last year mean to this team?**

"It means a lot. Last year was a whole other thing, but for us that were here — over 90% of the team — we definitely knew exactly what it felt like. It's a new year, and we're excited we came in here to the jungle — I think that's what they call this place, I'm not sure — and we got the job done."

**What's it mean to see Geno Stone make a huge play like that?**

"So proud of Geno for the play he made, man. I think (Joe) Burrow thought he had me. I was high-low near side, but we had a double trick. That was an amazing play by Geno. I'm excited for him for the way he stepped up and made the play. If he didn't run out of gas, he probably could've cut across and maybe had six."

**They didn't seem to have many answers for what you guys brought today. Did you feel extremely well-prepared coming into this game?**

"Oh, absolutely. I feel well-prepared week in and week out, with (defensive coordinator) Mike (Macdonald) at the helm, and what had been echoed through (inside linebackers coach) ZO (Zach Orr), my position coach, and on the back end (defensive backs coach) D-Will (Dennard Wilson) and (pass game coordinator/secondary coach) Chris (Hewitt), week in and week out. I've got a lot of respect for those guys, and the way they had guys ready to step up today. Some say, 'short-handed,' but as I said earlier, I had the utmost faith in all the guys that stepped on the field with us."

## **GENO STONE**

### **Safety**

**On the interception, were you just reading your keys and trusting your instincts to go to the middle?**

"Yeah, I just see him take an out route past that release, and after that just looked at the eyes and went back to the middle. I saw Joe (Burrow) look at Jamar (Chase) through that progression, so I just took my shot."

**Without Marlon Humphrey, the defense said you called your shot on this game?**

"Yeah, I think I told everyone today I was going to get one. Just the type of week I was having. I felt like I was going to do something. I'm just happy to do it."

**Had you been picking guys off in practice or what?**

"Nah, it was just a slow week for me, so I was due. I was due (laughs)."

**What's it mean for you to step up and have a game like this?**

"Yeah, it means a lot to me that the coaches trust me to put me in this position — to be where I am right now. I've got a lot of trust in my guys, and my guys got a lot of trust in me. I'm just happy I was out there and able to help the team win."

**Considering the bad health that you're in, relatively, and considering the good health they were in, what does this say about where you guys are in the AFC North?**

"I feel like we're a team that's going to fight, no matter who's out there. We have that 'next-man-up' mentality, and everyone is on this team for a reason. So whoever is out there, we got a chance to win with these guys."

## **GUS EDWARDS**

### **Running back**

**What does it mean to come in here not fully healthy and get this win?**

"I mean, they owed us one. I think it was a great team win. A lot of different guys made plays on both offense and defense. We started the game with a little bit of adversity with that kick return, but guys bounced back and we kept on fighting."

**What's it mean to finish the game with power running to move the chains on offense?**

"Credit to the O-line — everybody knew what time it was. It was pretty much a four-minute offense, and we needed to get first downs, and everybody had that mindset."

**Do you feel like the offense is coming into its own?**

"Yes, yes. I feel like we show a lot of potential. Like I said, a lot of different guys are touching the ball and making plays. We're loaded, we've just got to keep building off that and keep getting better."

**What was practice like this week and what was offensive coordinator Todd Monken like last week?**

"Fired up. Fired up. He's a real grinder. He loves to win by spreading the ball around. He brings energy, and he keeps it real 100 percent of the time."

**Did anyone step up pregame to deliver the fiery speech?**

“A lot of different guys — Roquan (Smith) said something that got everybody going. Mark (Andrews) said something. Everybody knew what type of game it was, and what time it was.”

**What's it mean to you to step into a leading role along with Justice Hill, and play so well with J.K. Dobbins out?**

“Means a lot. This is what you want — you want the ball in your hands. You want to make plays, and contribute to the team. I'm grateful for the opportunity, and I guess I'll keep making the best of it.”