

TENNESSEE TITANS VS. CINCINNATI BENGALS WEEK 12 POSTGAME QUOTES
Sunday, November 27, 2022

BENGALS HEAD COACH ZAC TAYLOR

Zac, your overall thoughts on how the game went out there?

I was really happy with how we played. I thought in the first half, it felt like we had some killer penalties that really set us back. We had some really bad field position but we hung in there. For it to be 10-10 at the half, it felt like the way the game had gone that we were in a really good space there. And defense came out, gave us great field position, we capitalized on it with a field goal early on in the second half. Guys stepped up and made plays. I thought our defense – one thing this team took to heart was how physical they heard this game was going to be and that's a credit to Tennessee because that's how they play, but our guys answered the bell today. You know, and to hold their lead back to 2.2 yards a carry and 38 yards, for the offense to rush for over 100 yards, for guys to step up and make one-on-one plays, for Mike Hilton to come off the edge and tackle that back one-on-one like he did, I thought was just a tremendous team effort today. I'm really proud of these guys.

Zac, Tennessee had the ball, first down at 2:25 late, late in the game. (Eli) Apple comes up, (Cam) Sample makes a great play. You hold them to a field goal. Talk about that series.

I thought really our red zone defense was excellent. Holding them to field goals, holding them before the half, they missed a field goal. They had a new kicker in there, so you want to make it harder on him, put the pressure on him. But I thought our defense did great job in the red zone, keeping them out of the end zone. They got the big screen for the touchdown. They do a great job of that, so that one got away from us. But I thought our defense did a great job keeping them to three points when they needed to.

Second straight week, Zac. Trenton (Irwin) makes a huge catch from the touchdown to try to go ahead. You talk about that play in the execution you guys had in that series.

Yeah, it's a third down. It's a one-on-one alert. And Joe (Burrow) went to Trent Irwin because he had a matchup that he liked. And so, I think that speaks volumes of the confidence, not only we have in Trenton (Irwin) to put him in that spot, but for Joe (Burrow) to go to him when the game was tight like that, and then to step up and make that play. Allowed us to finish off that drive the right way. I think the next play was when Tee (Higgins) caught the touchdown pass, right? So, that was huge for the momentum and a great job - great throw and great catch there by Trenton (Irwin).

There's no unique way to ask this. We've asked this before but how much of an advantage does it give you to have an elite quarterback in a game like this between two playoff teams down the stretch?

We wouldn't trade our quarterback for anybody on the planet, and so we're glad to have him.

As you mentioned, during the week with this physical part of it. Did you practice well? As you anticipate this?

Our defense has played physical every single game we played this year. I think they know that. They've got confidence in that. You know, the narrative can be whatever it needs to be all week, but our guys don't need any of that. They show up on Sundays and they play ball. And it's one of the best defenses in the league.

You talked about how pleased you were with the rushing performance, with full respect to Joe Mixon. Is there a possibility that Samaje Perine could be the lead back this week?

Samaje (Perine)'s always done a great job any time his number is called. (Joe) Mixon's done a great job when his number is called. We're looking for efficiency in our run game and we've got efficiency in our run game, whoever's carrying the football. And so, I think that just goes to show you that the confidence we have in that stable of backs and we're going to need everyone to step up in different parts of the season. And today, Samaje (Perine) did, Trayveon (Williams) did on his carries. I was pleased to see that from the running backs. I think Justin Hill has done a great job with that entire room, getting those guys ready so that when their number is called that they're prepared for the moment.

Coach, every team wants to shut down Derrick Henry from behind the line of scrimmage. You guys did that today. Can you talk about how the gameplan was in that specific that worked?

Yeah, I think we had a great plan starting with Lou (Anarumo) and all the coaches on defense. The players believed in that plan and they executed it to a tee. They put pressure on him the entire game. They hit the quarterback, and they just made play after play to win us back the field position there in the second half and allow us to go win.

How do you get a defense to be physical? Is it the guys you bring in?

Yeah, it's a mindset. It's a mindset. There's certainly things that we focus on. You know, we were still in pads as of this Thursday, maximizing the opportunities that we get there. That's really sending a message to the group that we're going to continue to be physical and play physical. And again, we've got the right guys that know that this is a big man's league. And you got to step up late in the year and be able to stop the run and win the line of scrimmage. And I thought our guys did a great job of that today.

Is this the kind of game that successful playoff teams win?

I think it was a game that we just needed to win today. I don't want to get into the playoff narrative or any of that. It's just this was the next team on the schedule. Our guys were ready to roll, had a great mindset. We know we've got another big one next week. We're going to continue to say that from now on, whatever. We got the Chiefs now. We've got to try to focus on them. We'll be excited to get back home in the jungle and get that place fired up and ready to go. We feel like we've been away there for a month now. It feels like we haven't had a home game in a long time. So, I know our guys will be excited to get back in there and play in front of our home crowd.

Zac, what can you say about the depth that you guys have at the offensive skill positions? Obviously, you talk about (Joe) Mixon not being out, but obviously, you guys have had Ja'Marr (Chase) for a little while now. Tee Higgins stepped up, (Samaje) Perine, a bunch of guys across the board on offense. What can you kind of say about that group?

We have the right guys and we have the right coaches. Because I think if you're talking about those rooms, you know what the skill guys are talking about. Justin Hill, I just mentioned him. Troy Walters, the job he and Brad Kragthorpe do with the receivers, maximize their potential. The job James Casey does. We lose a tight end in free agency last year. We lose our next tight end to an injury this year. And we get Hayden (Hurst) in there and he gets Hayden up to speed and maximizes his potential. Does the same thing with Mitch (Wilcox). Mitch is just continuing to develop because of James (Casey) helping him. And Mitch (Mitchell Wilcox)'s just willingness to continue to get better. Then Pitch (Dan Pitcher) has just done a great job in the quarterback room with (Joe) Burrow and all those guys. So, I think that there's such a belief that they're getting the instruction to reach their potential in the meeting rooms. I think our players truly understand that and see that. They've got confidence that we're going to put them in the right positions. And then again, (inaudible) done a great job just bringing in such supreme talent and they're reaching their potential. It's exciting to watch as a head coach.

Is there anything that you saw in your preparation or anything, looking at the Titans, that made you feel like Tee (Higgins) was going to have a big game today?

Tee (Higgins) always has a big game. A lot of those are just one-on-one opportunities. And so again, we feel like we've got great matchups with any corner in the league. If we get on-on-ones, we expect our guys to rise up to the challenge and make the plays. And that's what Tee (Higgins) did. Tee caught two go balls there in the second to last drive in the last (quarter) that really put the game on ice for us. And so we just got a ton of confidence in Tee there.

It seemed like you had a message through the week. We're in November. It gets physical. It's going to be cold, windy, whatever. The way they responded to win this type of game. I mean, that happened in this stretch. That had to be heartening, the way they won it.

Yeah, I think again, our team was ready, focused, felt it all week. We felt it last night. Felt it as we took the field today. Even though the first half wasn't perfect, you really came into halftime with a lot of confidence that this game was going to go our way because someone was going to step up and make a play. I was hoping that there was going to be a turnover that would help flip it. It didn't happen for either team. And again, our guys just came through in the end.

Why did Ja'Marr (Chase) not play today?

Just ultimately, we thought that was the smartest decision. You get a chance to get him back, practice for a week. Felt really encouraged with where he's at. And ultimately, as we got closer to the game, it was, 'Let's get him back to practice next week and then make that decision.' But yeah, there's not a gameplan on how this thing was going to unfold. I think ultimately, we're happy with how it played out that we didn't put him on IR. So, he got a chance to practice a week earlier than he would have. So now we can go into next week, I'm not going to make any promises, but feeling like, 'OK, we've seen him on the grass.' I think he's feeling pretty good. And so we'll just evaluate where he's at starting next Wednesday.

Zac, we don't ask you about him a lot, but can you just talk about the play of Mike Hilton today. Two big stops on Derrick Henry. How important is he in your defense?

You probably don't ask a lot because Mike Hilton, his play doesn't only show up in the stat sheet. It's the pre-snap game. He gets to play with the quarterbacks and he's the best in the world when it comes to that. The communication he's got, putting himself in position to take away a lot of

throws that don't show up in the stat sheet because the ball just doesn't go over there because he's in great position. He understands route concepts and is able to help himself in coverage there. And he is willing, I don't know what his height, weight is. I'm not going to guess, but he doesn't care. He plays like he's a 6-4, 240-pound linebacker. And that's what you need from a nickel. I've always maintained that those scrappy nickels are the biggest pains to deal with. He's smart. He's scrappy. He can cover. He can tackle. He can do it all. And we're really lucky to have Mike (Hilton).

How differently did the game feel with DJ Reader when you have those two swatted passes, limiting (Derrick) Henry to the game he had. How much different was it having him versus not having him the last couple weeks?

Yeah, he's just aware, you know? A lot of our batted passes come against really good D-tackles that are very aware and can kind of get a sense when the ball is going to come out and DJ (Reader) does an excellent job of that. We're waiting on one of those tips to turn into a pick. But again, DJ (Reader), in the first half, getting those two tips. Those two tips really helped us.

How important is the offense's ability to kind of tweak based on personnel?

It's just everybody being flexible. Nobody having an ego. I'm talking about every player, every coach. We're going to do whatever we got to do to win, whether that's throwing the ball 50 times, running the ball 50 times. Making adjustments over the course of a game or maybe plays that we didn't initially carry in the plan. I think everybody's just been so flexible and has such a high degree of confidence in how we're operating that it's allowed us to be successful.

I know you don't want to get into playoff scenarios, Zac, but before the game, Sam Hubbard and his little group before taking the field told the players that it's playoff football from here on out. Is that the mentality essentially that you have to have?

I think that's probably what guys feel. But again, we're just taking it game to game. Our focus has just got to be on controlling what we can control. And the only thing we can control is our preparation over the next six days for Kansas City. I try to stay out of the big picture beyond that. Let's just keep taking it one game at a time. Find a way to win these games.

What are the biggest keys for the roll you guys are on the last five or six games?

Just the confidence of the team. Each group has stepped up when we needed them to and I'm talking different position groups. Last week, our linebackers played out of their minds. I thought this week, our whole defense played great just because of our ability to stop the run there. Our corners made some really good one-on-one plays today because they're going to be testing the pass game when you stop the run like that. And I think on offense, just the whole unit. I mean, I think our line's giving us everything we need to be successful right now. They're helping the run game. They got a lot of confidence in it. Doing a great job communicating what calls are going to be helpful for them. And I thought the protection in the pass game was outstanding. You know, it's I was actually a little surprised we didn't get a scramble for a touchdown at some point in the game because they do a great job mixing up the coverages to keep you off guard. But our protection was really good and Joe (Burrow) was doing a good job, kind of sitting back there waiting for someone to break free. And I thought that was really good to see.

Zac, your reaction on the field goal that made it on the board. Still would have been a one score game. And then when you heard about the personal foul to give you a chance to run out the clock.

Yeah, that was nice. We were just mentally getting ready for downtime. You know, if we got a turnover on defense to go down and not try to score, the game's going to be over. And then I was already alerted that they had a penalty. I watched the field all go through and then turn my back. Don't exactly still know what happened, but I'll take it.

BENGALS QUARTERBACK JOE BURROW

What did you see on the (touchdown) drive to Tee Higgins?

The biggest play of that drive was the third-and-10 to Trenton Irwin hitting that back shoulder throw. That was a throw we worked this week with him. He doesn't get a lot of opportunities and he continues to make plays when the opportunities present themselves.

What led you all to work on that in practice?

We felt good about what he has been doing and we had about one or two third-down plays where he was in the boundary by himself and running that route, and we were able to execute.

Why has this offense been able to tweak its identity?

Guys stepping up. It was great to get a win like this. This is kind of like how they all were down the stretch last year. Maybe we left a lot on the field on offense, defense stepped up and made the plays in the fourth quarter to go win the game.

What have been the keys for the last four or five games?

Finding completions. The run game starting to show itself. We ran really, really well today against a great front, a great run defense. We were really physical. Protection was awesome. Our offensive line gets better and better and guys are making plays.

Did this game have a grind and your team wanted to make plays in the second half?

Yes, we left a lot on the field the first half and obviously you would like to have those back. We didn't let that affect the second half. We were able to come out, and I thought for the most part, play well in the second half. In the fourth quarter guys made one on one plays to win the game really.

Is this the type of game successful playoff teams win?

This is the type of games great teams win. It's not always going to be pretty. It's the NFL and you are playing really, really good teams on the opposing end. It's not going to be pretty all the time, but you got to find ways to win and now we are starting to do that.

What was key on getting Tee Higgins going?

Just getting him more opportunities. He just continues to make plays in his one on one opportunities and if you give him a chance, he is just so big and strong, he is going to go out and make the plays.

Was that the bench route?

Yes.

What impact did Samaje Perine have on the game?

He just runs so hard. I don't know what his stats were, but I think he had to be close to 100, I think. But he just continues to make the best of his opportunities. I am so happy for him to get the chance and continue to make the most out of it.

Why is the bench route so successful?

We have really good players on the outside that run vertically and can come out of it quickly. We got great players.

Did you know you were going to Tee (Higgins) on that play?

Yeah, when the going gets tough I'm going to find the guys that I have the most trust in, and Tee (Higgins) is that guy. He just continues to make plays when his opportunities come.

What was said about how physical your team was perceived?

I think we showed how physical we were today. We ran the ball against a team that hasn't really given up many rushing yards all year. That's a credit to the offensive line being really physical, strong, understanding the scheme and to Samaje (Perine) and Trayveon (Williams) on running really hard, and making the most out of whenever they get contact at two yards and fall forward for five. That's the key.

What was so special about Joe Burrow the running back today?

It just kind of fell that way. Some games end up being like that where maybe they are doing a great job in coverage and the offensive line protect great, and I was able to find some lanes and get out and steal a couple of first downs. I think that is a part of my game I can continue to utilize throughout my career.

Is it that time of year when you guys realize you have to have wins?

It is December now and this is when football counts. We are 7-4. We are in a great spot. We are happy with our continued improvement throughout the season but now it time to show what kind of championship mentality we have with this coming schedule. I know we will be ready for it.

What is it in your make that you thrive for this type of game?

I just think I prepare really well and I understand what I am doing. I want the ball in my hands in those kinds of situations. I have got great people around me that I have trust in to make plays.

How important is Hayden Hurst in this offense?

He continues to play really well. You see over and over he catches the ball short and gets seven yards, and that's so key to have as a tight end when you have guys like we have on the outside. Maybe you are not going to get a lot of opportunities, but when you do, you have to get us those extra dirty yards and that is what he does so well.

What do you have to say about the progress of the offensive line?

They're playing as good as anybody in the league. Our run game has really taken off. Our protection was awesome today. I had so much time in the pocket to be able to find guys or try to

find an escape route and go make plays with my legs. I am so proud of those guys for how they are playing.

Can you talk about how the defense played today?

Whenever we play teams like this I have so much confidence in our guys because what I think what we do best is stop the run, and our guys DJ (Reader), B.J. (Hill), Sam (Hubbard), Trey (Hendrickson), they just play so hard it's tough to find those extra yards in the run game because we gang tackle. They play with so much effort. It was fun to watch them play today.

Do you feel like the team is playing championship style football?

Yeah, we continue to get better. We are having great practices. We got a big-time schedule coming up, a big game this week against a team that we know well, we've played in the past and we will be ready for it. The schedule coming up is obviously tough but this is what it takes in December and January to go and win one.

Is it fun watching Mike Hilton make plays?

That guy is so fun to watch. He is just this little guy out there that doesn't care about his body, just throws it around, doesn't matter how big the other guy is and that's the kind of guy you want on your team. Great locker room guy, great player who just makes plays.

How happy are you not to play against DJ Reader?

It is great to have that guy back just because he is so big and strong, understands the scheme and plays so hard. We are starting to get all our guys back healthy, and I think we are going to take off here.

BENGALS WIDE RECEIVER TEE HIGGINS

Zac (Taylor) said it was all about you winning one-on-one opportunities today. What's the key in those situations, to get the best of your opponent?

Just the trust that Joe (Burrow) has in me. For him to just throw the ball up for me, and him trusting me that I'll come down with it, it means a lot.

You played really well last year, obviously. How much do you feel like you've improved this season?

It's my job to get better each and every season, so I feel like I've improved tremendously from last year.

Joe Burrow said it shows championship mentality to win a game like this. What do you think that says about this team right now?

Yeah, we're just playing good football right now. We just got to keep stacking the "W's" and keep it going.

With Ja'Marr (Chase) out, have you put any pressure on yourself in those big moments? Like at the end of the game? You know the ball is coming of your way. I mean, you just you feel any pressure? Do you put any pressure on yourself?

No, I want those. I come into the game wanting those. So just by them calling my number, I expect to make that play and it's my job to go do it.

Joe Burrow said it was the bench route again that helped clinch the game. You have confidence in that route obviously against the Titans. It worked again. How much fun was it for you this time to have to make that play?

It's just practicing it all week. Make sure we're on the same page. It was one play they went to and I ran the bench and they still gave me a chance.

Who ran a better bench route, you this year or Ja'Marr (Chase) last year?

Me.

How much did it mean to come down here and do it in this building?

It means a lot, especially being from Tennessee and growing up two hours away. I had my friends and family here and it meant a lot just to come out here to have a big game just for them.

BENGALS LINEBACKER LOGAN WILSON

Logan, what do you feel the key to containing Derrick Henry outside of the big run was today? You guys were able to keep the NFL's best running back in check all game.

I think it starts up front. Our D-linemen did a heck of a job on him and really allowed linebackers and the back-end guys to kind of run free and make tackles. When they had opportunities to make plays, they made them. We just tried to limit those explosive plays in the run game and obviously they got some of the pass game, so we'll learn from some of those. But for the most part, I think we did what we planned on doing.

How big is that? Not letting Derrick Henry get a full head of speed because once he gets going, he's really hard to stop?

Yeah, once he gets north and south, he's one of, if not the best, back in the league when he gets north and south. So, you've got to try to limit the push up front so that he has to go more side to side. We had some things in our gameplan that we thought would help.

What happened on that big run, from your perspective? On the screen for the touchdown.

We just had one guy short and there was just way too much open space for him. Hats off to Cam (Taylor-Britt) for hustling down and making that play. We need to hustle even more to get there so that when that happens again, we're in position to recover that fumble, not them. We'll take a look at it and learn from it.

Obviously, last year he's coming off of an injury and this year he's healthy. Is that one of those plays where on film you know how fast and physical Henry is, but then, you're on the grass, then you see him break off one like that, you're like, 'He's almost even faster than I thought'?

I wasn't even really thinking about that, it was more of like we felt like we gave them that run instead of them getting it on us. We just felt like we need to be better on that play. Obviously, they got the touchdown which we never want. But, we ended up getting the win at the end of the game, and that's the biggest thing.

What was the message like about maybe the physicality that either was required or was needed to be required to win this game throughout the week?

I mean, we know that they're a run-first team. They've got one of the best backs in the league, if not the best back in the league. It starts up front with our D-line. They did a heck of a job all week in practice and then today, that just allows us linebackers to do what we do. Same with the back-end guys. Obviously, there's still some plays that we let explosives up, and we'll look at it and learn from it and move on.

BENGALS DEFENSIVE BACK MIKE HILTON

How much do you have to change your approach when you tackle a guy like Derrick Henry?

I mean, I got to hit him low like I hit everybody else. He's a physical guy, but so am I. I live for games like this and went out and proved it today.

Looks like you guys mixed it up—five-man, four-man, free safeties, two safeties...

Yeah, we mixed it up and kept them off-balance. Strong looks, two-high – definitely wanted to put it in (Ryan) Tannehill's hands and, you know, good things came our way. We were able to stop the run and make them one-dimensional.

What's the key to stopping (Derrick) Henry?

Just get him before he gets going. Everybody knows once he's headed downhill—as you can see on the screen (play), once he gets a head of steam, it's hard. Once you get in the backfield and slow him down, you better your chances.

(Inaudible)

We got 11 starters that (are) out there willing to do whatever for each other. We're a tight-knit group. We love each other. You see one guy makes a play, we all celebrate.

Mike, in so many ways, this felt like the playoff game where you shut down the Titans defensively and won the game. What does it say about this team now to win this way?

We are who everybody thinks we are. Everybody thinks we weren't – what did we start, 0-2? Now we turn this around. We got the guys in the locker room and the folks at the top to really lead us. We're just taking it one game at a time. This was a big one for us, and we're excited about the next one.

What goes through your mind when you make it into the backfield and you're able to trip off Derrick Henry like--

It wasn't a trip. Get it right. It was a tackle. Make sure you get it right. It's nothing new for me. I live for games like this. I tell everybody, I just look like this. You know what I mean? You turn on my tape, I show what I do best, and that's just being a playmaker.

Is there a better feeling that that on the road?

Oh, no. You come into a hostile environment like that. Playoff implications. Able to walk home with a victory. It's big for us.

BENGALS HALFBACK SAMAJE PERINE

With full respect to your teammate and friend, Joe Mixon, do you feel like if you were given the spot as the No. 1 back against the Chiefs, that that's something that you could really take over for the rest of the season?

Nothing to do with me. It's unfortunate that he got hurt, and I hope he comes back soon. I just went out and tried to help the team win. Obviously, we miss him out there and can't wait until he's back. But until then, I'll hold the fort down.

That was your most carries since your rookie year--17 times in 2017. What's it like to kind of have that workload? Is that fun to kind of get in the rhythm like that and be able to do that?

Yeah, I mean it's always fun to, like you say, get in a rhythm and make some stuff happen. But just went out there and did what I could.

Could you talk about the physicality of this game? They obviously pride themselves on being the most physical team, and it felt like from the start you guys were the ones who were the aggressors.

Because that's what we've heard all week, coming into the game, that we've got to match their physicality. We've got to meet it and be ready for it and bring the physicality as well. They got to match our physicality. We're a different team than we were last year, and it showed out there today. Whatever they throw in front of us, we're ready for it and we're going to be physical.

Did it feel like a playoff game?

Oh, yes. All of these games, for sure.