



BENGALS POSTGAME QUOTES

DEC. 10, 2023

INDIANAPOLIS AT CINCINNATI

ZAC TAYLOR

Head coach

How did you regroup after the end of the first half?

"We talked about this last night. We can't give them anything easy. That's what it felt like there at the end, with the last defensive drive. We played great defensive football in the first half. We gave it up there, then Ronnie Harrison Jr had that pick-six — (he) did a great job. That's the way it goes sometimes going into the half — either you have the momentum or you don't. We didn't have it, but everyone had their poise throughout. We rallied together knowing we had to set the tone with the ball to come out. The offense did a great job scoring coming out, defense got a stop, and we took control of the game in a moment where we had to do that. I'm really proud of the guys in all three phases for being able to do that."

What has Chase Brown brought to the offense?

"He's done a great job controlling what he can control. When he came back off the injury, he's shown great attention to detail as a rookie with what we're asking him to handle. He makes plays when his number is called. This whole rookie class has had the right mindset since they walked in. It's a really impressive class. Chase has had a great two games, but as a whole that group has done a great job of mentally being about the right stuff in their rookie seasons."

What happened with Jake Browning's hand, and what did you think of his performance?

"I thought Jake did a great job handling all the different situations. It was cramps, so he came in and got an IV. That's what it was."

Did it look worse when it happened?

"No, it wasn't."

Trey Hendrickson bounced back from his penalty ...

"He's a force out there. You have to pay attention to him at all times. Even when he's not hitting the quarterback and making plays, they feel him and have to devote resources to him. It allows our other guys to step up. Trey did a great job today, our defense as a whole. They rushed for less than 50 yards and (we) had three sacks. That's a great defensive effort overall with the coverage, the rush, and tackling."

What did you think of Trey Hendrickson's roughing the passer penalty, and how the team responded after?

"We can't have it. Trey knows that. He's the first one to own up to it. It is what it is, we move on from it. We've done a great job keeping penalties not being a part of what we do. It was just a learning moment for everyone and we will respond the right way."

You've won with a lot of different offensive identities lately. Why has that worked?

"I don't know if it's really been that different. They're all things we've done over the course of the season. Each defense we play is a big driving force for how the game is played. We haven't called a single play that we didn't rep all training camp and fall. These guys believe in what we're doing and have done a great job. We've really called upon every resource we have on offense, and everyone has stepped up. So many guys made catches and big plays today. We're not afraid to use everybody on the roster that's active. We have faith that everyone can step up and do their job."

How much did you feel the team's energy after the Week 12 loss to the Steelers?

"I felt it throughout the whole process. Even in the losses, it's what keeps me optimistic, being around the guys and the way they continue to approach their job every single day. That's why we built the team the way Duke (Tobin) and everybody has. It's for these types of moments. Every team in the league faces adversity over the course of the season. It's which teams that handle it and can respond and not crater. These are the guys that continue to respond, but we have to prove it again next week. It's not good enough to just do what we've done the last two weeks. We have to keep stacking, and we have a history of doing that. Obviously this is a new team, the 2023 team, and we have to prove ourselves again these next couple weeks that we can continue to play good football in December."

What did you think of the offensive line's performance today, with only three quarterback hits and zero sacks allowed?

"Awesome, I felt it throughout. One of the hits was on a cross, which is tough if they play it the right way. We still hit Tyler Boyd for a big gain. Those guys up front did a great job. There's great comradery in that room, they do a great job playing together. They take pride in keeping the quarterback healthy, getting the run game going, clearing the perimeter on screens. Those guys have risen to the challenge and are really helping us right now."

Two straight games won two very different ways on a short week. Can you feel a momentum shift?

"The easiest way to put it is this team has had confidence throughout. We know reasons we've lost games, reasons we've won games, we know what our formula is. We have to play disciplined, protect the football, and different guys have to step up in different moments. A lot of guys stepped up, we did a great job protecting the ball aside from Ronnie Harrison Jr.'s great play on the pick-six. We forced some turnovers as well — DJ Ivey did that today. Different guys stepping up, and that's what you need at this point in the season."

Did you expect the screen game to be as effective as it was?

"I was hopeful. That impactful, maybe not. That's not just Chase Brown and Joe Mixon. Ted (Karras) had a huge block on the nickel for Chase's touchdown run. A lot of guys got out in space and making defensive backs move out a little, even if they're not making the block. Receivers did a good job selling it. Jake (Browning) held the ball until he had to get it out with good ball placement. It's everybody, but it is part of our offense that's really been impactful these last few weeks."

You've put up 30 points two straight games with a backup quarterback—what does that mean?

"We felt like we were in a great flow on offense the last eight or nine weeks. The Pittsburgh game was our outlier, but I felt like we've been playing good football, so the quarterback jumps in and is prepared. He just needs to step up, be prepared, and play as best as he can without our starter out there. Jake (Browning) has done that. The guys believe in him, but it's not about one guy, it's the unit coming together and the defense, special teams supplementing that. I think the team effort has been outstanding the last two weeks."

Chase Brown's speed was 22 miles per hour, second fastest in the league. Did you know he was that fast?

"We've learned he is that fast. We do the GPS in practice on kickoff return, things like that. He's had opportunities to show how fast he is. Second fastest? That's pretty good. He's a fast guy. Real fast."

Have you seen those numbers in practice?

"I think he's gotten to 22 (miles per hour), yes. I don't know how high above it, but he's fast."

Do you think he gave Joe Mixon a spark today?

"I've sat up here and told you, I think Joe Mixon is giving us what we needed. That's maybe a different narrative, but I continue to be pleased with what he brings. It's a good combo we have going right now, and there's nothing wrong with that. Most teams in the league have that. I'm pleased with the job Justin Hill continues to do with that room. He's on it, does a great job developing those guys. I'm pleased with what they provided us. Trayveon Williams on third downs has a role. It didn't come up as much today, but they all have different roles. Sometimes they're magnified, sometimes they're not. He's done a good job in that role too."

What can you say about Jake (Browning's) ability to put extended drives together?

"It's everybody. It's the defense is not giving the momentum. It's the guys on offense making a lot of plays and Jake distributing it the right way. Other than that three-and-out to start the game and it was a clunky two-minute situation, we felt like we were scoring touchdowns every drive. Maybe that doesn't add up, but when Jake got hurt was our next punt. We felt like we had really good momentum and our guys did a good job executing and staying ahead. Hats off to the linemen, they started that process. They protect, get the run game going. All the other guys were making the plays that come to them."

The red-zone defense stepped up again today ...

"That's something you feel when you get in there. We don't assume there's going to be a field goal occurring, or a touchdown. Even the fourth down they scored on, in my mind we're getting the ball back on the two (yard line). That's just the mentality they've instilled because of what they've done. That's what the facts state, so there's a belief because they've done it so many times. They have a belief they won't give up points and they find a way to get the ball back. It flows over to other parts of the team and that's how it goes sometimes."

Have you been surprised by Jake (Browning's) transition from practice to game speed?

"I don't look at him as a young guy. He's been here now for three years — that's old in this league. He knows what makes a really good backup quarterback. It's being able to take the reps you're not getting mentally, and manufacturing them in practice. Dan Pitcher does a great job with that. You'd handle him differently if he was a rookie or second year guy. I feel like we have a veteran quarterback out there, just getting his first action in front of a whole stadium. This is why we've given him the opportunity to compete for the job, this is why he won the job and this is why he stuck around for three years. A lot of times the guys on the practice squad, you just switch them out after two years. But Jake had all the intangible stuff, the skills we saw that made us think he can be an effective player for us. All he's done is continue to prove that right. He knows the season doesn't end today. He has to continue to stack and prepare. I'm sure we have another tough defense coming in next week with Minnesota. He has controlled what he can control at this point."

JAKE BROWNING

Quarterback

We heard that you told the team that you didn't drink enough water, and that's what happened with the cramp in your hand.

Can you walk us through what happened? It looked like you got hit and we didn't know what happened ...

"No, my thumb, forearm just all started cramping. My thumb was just locking up on me. I couldn't throw. Then, I came in and got an IV and was fine. Yeah, it's pretty dumb, but I just have to drink more water and electrolytes, I guess. I think sometimes when it's cold, you just aren't thirsty. So, yeah, that's probably the main take away from the game — hydrate better."

Have your teammates already given you a hard time about water? Do you think that's coming?

"Yeah, I'm sure it will be, but I think everyone is just happy we won. I mean, it's kind of embarrassing, but it is what it is."

After Monday night at Jacksonville, you talked about following it up with another good performance. You did that today. What does it feel like to go back-to-back?

"It feels good. It feels like we got some good rhythm going. I think as well as we played on offense, I thought our O-line had a really good game. No sacks, a couple explosive screens, ran the ball for 100-plus yards. I think for all these post-game press conferences, you kind of go back to the same thing of, 'It's never as good as you think, it's never as bad as you think.' So, I know there are some things that I can improve on, and so that will kind of be my focus. But it feels better doing that when you won and trying to keep getting better, instead of losing and trying to get better. So, we'll take it."

Just like the other night, you had a bad 20 seconds where suddenly the game changed. But just like on Monday night, you guys didn't fold. Why is that?

"I threw a bad pass to Tanner (Hudson). He tried to make a play on it. I need to throw it to him in the chest. Then, they return it for a pick-six. So, that was tough, but I think coming into halftime my thought process was, 'The only time that they haven't stopped us is when I threw it to the other team. So, just don't do that, and we'll move the ball well.'"

On the throw to Tanner Hudson, did you just throw it too far inside of him?

"Yes, I thought he was going to sit, and then he kind of sat and broke out a little bit. I'm sure he was right; I might have just thrown it too far inside. He goes out and tries to make the one-handed catch and it kind of goes into the guy's lap. I think if I just throw it to him in the chest, then we'll avoid the whole problem."

What is the key to a 92-yard scoring drive and three others of 70 or more yards? What's the key to having long drives?

"I feel like our offense is doing a good job of running the ball well, having some plays off those runs, then some explosives. It all seems to kind of be flowing well. We're doing a good job of complementing each other. I think, like I said, our O-line played incredible. I

think they were really the consistent force throughout the game, and I think when we do that, there's an opportunity for some explosives. We obviously have the guys on the outside to do that."

Why has the screen game been so good for you guys?

"I don't know. I don't spend that much time on screens, just kind of do my part on it and try to sell passes. I think part of what they do on defense is limit the explosives. So, part of that is playing soft; they're running everybody out underneath to try to stop the intermediate to long pass game. So, when you dump off a few and let some O-linemen get out in front, that's kind of the game you play when you play defense like that. Some of the underneath stuff is going to be there. I thought Chase (Brown) had a really good run after the catch. I didn't get the best view of it, but it went for 50-plus (yards), so we'll take that in the stats. Then, the same with Joe Mixon. (It was) the second week in a row where Joe Mixon has had a big-time screen to spring an explosive."

You guys have found a style that fits your strengths as an offense. Why has that worked? What is the process between you and the staff?

"I'm not sure, but I keep going back to it starts up front and with Joe (Mixon). When we're able to run the ball well and you have to dedicate more resources to stopping the run, then we have really good skill players on the outside. I feel very comfortable with how everything is going, Zac (Taylor) calling the game, feeling like we're staying a step ahead as far as run-pass, having everything kind of look the same, mixing in some screens. It makes my job easy."

How much does going under center maybe help everything kind of look the same?

"I think the more you can do, the more looks you present to the defense and the more that all those looks have multiple things you can run out of those formations or those sets, I think it makes it difficult. I feel like we're doing a good job of that."

Did you know that Chase Brown is this explosive? Have you seen it in practice, or have the last two weeks been a surprise?

"Yeah, I knew that Chase was super fast. When he's running the ball in practice, he does a good job of getting vertical, putting his foot in the ground and being explosive. So, it was awesome to see him. I think you saw a little bit of it last week with a couple big runs, and then today with the screen, it was obviously a huge play. I think he'll continue to do a lot for us. It's kind of nice to have the one-two punch of him and Joe Mixon. I think every good offense needs two legit running backs, and I think we have that."

Do you think that they complement each other well?

"Yeah, very."

Joe Mixon was just asked if he thinks this is a playoff team, and he started off his answer by saying, 'Damn right.' What do you think, is this a playoff team?

"Damn right."

Your family got some serious airtime. I know you didn't see that, but they were very proud of you. What did it mean to have them in the box?

"Well first of all, it is not my box. I did not buy that in the preseason — it's very expensive. So, Joe Burrow was nice enough to give them some tickets so they didn't have to sit up in the cold. We're all from California, so I'm used to it, they're not. I'm sure they were much more excited in the box. It's awesome to have them here. I think it was two friends from back home, my girlfriend, and then my brother, my sister and my sister's boyfriend. It's always nice to have people there, and it's mostly nice after you win to go grab dinner or something somewhere."

Did Joe Burrow say anything when you came back onto the field from the cramps?

"I think he was just laughing, and I was just kind of like, 'Yeah, that was kind of embarrassing.' Drink more water."

Did you know the whole time that it wasn't broken?

"Yeah, it was slowly cramping on me, and then I tried to start chugging water. I think it was too late — I don't know. I should start getting an IV at halftime, I guess. I'm not sure."

In terms of the concept on third downs, it seemed like there were seven- and six-man protections ...,

"Yeah, I don't think that they pressured us a ton. That's not really what they do. There will be some games where it's all the sudden a pressure game, but I don't think that they pressured us a ton, particularly probably because they're working in a new linebacker and they want to make sure that everything is sound. I thought our third-down plan was good and our overall scheme was good."

Jonah Williams said that the team has been playing looser since you took over as the starting quarterback. Are you cognizant of how much the way you handle situations weighs in the locker room?

"Yeah, I think my relationship with guys on the team kind of goes back to being here for a while, and not really being in a (starting role) ... People are going to approach Joe (Burrow) differently than they approach me when I'm the backup, so I kind of get to know all of these guys really well on a pretty personal level. So I think, now that I'm playing and all that, we still have that same relationship. I still feel like the exact same person. I think also, I'm just genuinely being myself. I struggle to get outside of that."

You said this week that you haven't been riding the roller coaster of all the emotions. You showed some emotion walking off the field with the crowd cheering for you after your first home win. Was that a little extra meaningful for you?

"Yeah, I think it was. I mean, yes and maybe not. I don't know. It was cool to get a win at home. Last time we had a home game, we put up (only) 10 points. So, it was nice to put up some points and get a win. I think enjoying those moments is part of it. So, it wasn't really well-thought through, it was just something that kind of happened."

The biggest difference in the offense since you took over seems to be the run game, and your reliance on the run game ...

"Yeah, like I said a couple times now, our O-line is playing great football. I think there's a lot written about our guys on the outside, and obviously they're some of the best players in the NFL too, and Joe Mixon is a great running back. But, our O-line and our tight ends have been blocking their (tails) off, and I think that's a big part of why we've been successful."

How important was that first drive in the second half, to go and score?

"Very important, just because I felt like they probably had the momentum. I don't really feel that that much as the game's going on. I don't know if maybe I'm the outlier there, but I just feel like the more I focus on doing my job and holding my attention to each play and executing each play how I'm supposed to, that's kind of when I play my best. So, I just like to stay right there."

So, you don't come out of halftime saying, 'We get the ball here, we have to make an impact score'?"

"I think on every drive, I'm just, 'Let's go score.' Everybody just do their job, and we're plenty talented enough, we have a great play caller, a great scheme, and just do your job."

The first time you got the ball to Tee Higgins was on one of the first plays of the second half. Was there anything you saw?

"I can't even remember which play that was. Sorry."

Over the past few weeks, you've focused on handling what's immediately in front of you, whether that be the next play in the game, whatever. Winning on a short week, winning two times in a row in very different ways, can you feel momentum building among this team in the locker room?

"Yeah. This was our first short week; the last one was kind of a long week. The Thursday night game was a long week. So, now we have the two short weeks, back-to-back. Honestly, it's kind of nice, because you just kind of stay in the moment and you're so busy trying to prepare on a short week that you don't really have any free (time). The worst thing that happens with a lot of this stuff is an idle mind and free time. So, I don't really have either one of those on short weeks, so it's probably an advantage."

On the play before you took a knee to leave the game, it looked like you had a receiver down the right side and you pulled it down and scrambled. Was that in the moment, feeling a cramp?

"No. I was going to throw a hitch to the right, and he converted it to a 'go,' so I was kind of in scramble mode at that point. I really just started to feel it when I threw the one to Tee (Higgins). I should've given him a better ball, and then he would've had 100 yards. I just kind of started feeling it a little bit, but it's kind of too late at that point. Then, it got to third down, and it was, 'Alright, we need to throw it here,' and my thumb is just completely locked up, so I went down. I need to hydrate better."

Zac Taylor refers to you as his veteran quarterback. Do you feel like they are treating you as a veteran quarterback in terms of freedom, and play calling and things of that nature?

"Yeah, I don't think there is much put into the game plan that's just, 'Hey, let's just protect this guy.' I think it's, 'We're calling what gives us the best chance to win.' I think that's how it should be, and that's kind of been my communication throughout the whole thing. There are certain things that I like — more maybe than some things that Joe (Burrow) doesn't — that I do, or whatever. That's just personal preference. I think that gets taken into account when we're putting together the game plan. I think you see a lot of backup quarterbacks go in, and maybe there's not a lot of confidence in them, so you kind of try to protect them with, 'Let's get the ball out quick,' or 'Let's call a lot of screens.' We called a lot of screens, and they all worked, but I think that was mostly because we thought they were going to work. So, yeah, I feel like I'm going to keep getting better, but I feel comfortable. I don't even think I answered your question."

JOE MIXON
Running back

How did it feel to get your first win at home since November?

"It's a great feeling. The vibes are up over here. Everybody's doing whatever they can to contribute to the team and I feel like everybody's playing complementary football, taking care of the football, getting takeaways and doing all the right things. We've just got to keep it up."

What has changed over the last couple of weeks with the running game and the number of touches you're getting? What kind of conversations have there been about that?

"It's all about will and want to. Will and want to and everybody doing the right things — linemen making the big blocks, running backs doing whatever we can to make the right cuts and get positive yardage, and we've just been keeping our foot on the gas."

Last year, you said that you were having meeting with the offensive linemen. Have those continued this season?

"Yeah, they definitely have. Everybody is doing everything they need to do to stay successful, keep building and getting better. We've just got to keep stacking. We talk about (how) everything is in front of us and as you see, it definitely is. We're going to be all right. We're going to be in great position to make a play."

You and Chase Brown complement each other so well. How fun is it to go back and forth and have you both running the way you are right now?

"I think he's stepping in and doing his thing. He's bringing a spark and I feel he's doing a great job, especially as a rookie. He's learned the playbook. He's doing all the right things right and (we've) just got to keep it up. We're feeding off each other, so once you make one play, that leads to another. Everybody's going to need it."

You were a guy he looked up to so much coming into the league initially ...

"Obviously, as a back that's been in a league, I think that's pretty cool for him to be looking up to me and things like that, but I can tell that boy has been taking notes. I like to see that. It's all good, everybody's doing well and like I said, he's doing well and it's a great thing to see."

TEE HIGGINS
Wide receiver

How did it feel to get your first win at home since Week 9?

"It feels good just to get the 'W' for our fans. That's most important. You know you've got to make sure the Jungle fans are happy. It felt good. It's good for the team. We've just got to keep stacking."

It seems like everything is going so well with the offense right now. How much fun is it when you're executing at the level you are right now?

"Yeah, it's a lot of fun, obviously, especially when we've got the run game going. It's good to see our running backs with a big smile on their face the whole game. As long as we complement each other, we'll be all right."

You caught a touchdown only for it to be called back for offensive pass interference. Did you think that was the right call?

"I thought it was a touchdown. (The defender) was a basketball player right there and flopped a little bit. He sold it, but you can't take it back now. It is what it is."

How do you think Jake Browning is playing?

"He's playing his butt off, man. He's playing like a true number one quarterback and that's all you can ask for in a guy like him is to

come in — he’s been with this offense for two years — and just come in and it’s showing that he’s been in this offense and has been ready.”

Are you guys convinced you can make this run all the way through the rest of the regular season?

“That’s the plan. That’s the goal.”

What was going through your mind when you saw Jake Browning had to leave the field?

“Obviously, you don’t want any of your guys to get hurt, especially at the quarterback position, but our QBs are so well prepared. I knew that once AJ (McCarron) came in, it wasn’t going to be no slouch(ing) or stepping back. When AJ came in, everyone had great confidence in him and I know he had great confidence. He’s been there before and he’s been there and done it.”

MIKE HILTON

Cornerback

Do you guys feel like you have momentum on your side right now?

“Absolutely. Momentum carries you throughout the season at some points and we’re finally over .500, in the thick of the playoff race. We’ve got to take it one game at a time, but we like where we’re at.”

It seems like you guys are having fun right now ...

“Absolutely. This is something we love to do. Obviously, losing our star quarterback is big, but it’s next man up, and Jake (Browning) has stepped in with the same confidence as Joe (Burrow). He plays with a lot of confidence and we’ve got his back. We’re trying to keep it going.”

That seems to be the nature of the NFL with injuries and having backup players thrust into big roles ...

“At this point, it’s like there’s a lot of backup quarterbacks (starting) around the league. It’s been one of those years. We’re one of those teams in that situation, but we thrive in situations like this when our back is against the wall and we know we’ve got to fight to keep our season alive.”

Do guys talk about those things or do they just happen?

“It’s just the feel of the locker room. Like I said, we know who we are as a team and we went far the last two years, and we pretty much still have that same whole roster. We know what it takes — we’ve just got to go out and take it one game at a time.”

ORLANDO BROWN

Tackle

The running game did well today. The line was doubling guys, making them guess what you were doing ...

“That’s what allows defensive lines to get confused. I use the (phrase) ‘make them play us,’ honest. When games are called the way they are and we’re able to be physical at the line of scrimmage in the run game and take them out of certain coverages, you can’t cover our playmakers one-on-one — running backs, wide receivers or tight ends. Everyone’s special.”

For the second week in a row, the team showed resiliency and mental toughness. You had 14 points scored against you in two minutes against the Jaguars, and 14 points scored against you in 25 seconds against the Colts. Talk about that ...

“It’s just what the focus and execution has been there. When you have that type of execution, any team in the NFL is hard to beat. We do a good job with the turnovers, and not really shooting ourselves in the foot with penalties. Everything kind of goes hand-in-hand to be able to execute at a high level.”

Your team works on situational football. Today you beat the Colts on third downs, you beat them in the red zone ... really, you beat them in every situation in this game. And to win by 20 points in the NFL, that’s saying something, right?

“It is, it is. But it’s simple. It really comes down to execution, especially this time of year — not putting yourself in a bad position with penalties. The way that Jake (Browning) is playing, hats off to him. Everything goes hand-and-hand, and we were able to really come out here and play our best football. We need to continue to grow. We still have a lot of football left to play.”

Trey Hendrickson had a heck of a game with two sacks and the forced interception ...

“We see it every day in practice, during training camp and the offseason. He’s special. That’s who he is. He works hard every day. He comes in with his head down and really goes to work every single day with everything that he’s doing — weight room, film, and at practice he’s attacking at full speed. That’s what makes him so special.”

What can you say about Jake Browning’s back-to-back performances?

“Just the moxie that he’s coming out with, the energy that he brings, the swagger, the confidence. It’s there, and we’re rallying behind him. He is QB1.”

CHASE BROWN

Running back

How much juice do you think you’ve given this offense?

“I’m just playing my role right now. When there’s time to make a play, I’m going to keep on doing that and helping this team win games.”

Do you know how fast you were going on that touchdown?

“I heard it was like 22.1 (MPH).”

That’s the second fastest time in the league this year. Did you know that?

“For real? That’s pretty cool.”

Has speed always been a big part of your game?

“Not necessarily in college. I was more slow-pace. Once I got to the NFL and working with coach (Justin) Hill, the main thing is using that speed as an advantage. That’s something we were talking about all week. When the opportunity was there and I saw tons of space, I thought I’m going to turn on the jets. Especially after that big run against Jacksonville, I thought if I could turn on the jets, I could make a big play.”

You and Joe Mixon seem to complement each other well ...

“Yeah, Joe’s a great player. He’s been playing in this league for seven years. And to be able to watch him and learn from him, trying to feed off of him and the energy he brings to the games, I think we complement each other well. At the end of the day, it’s about winning games and playing all roles. Whatever that is, I’ll keep on doing that.”

After these last two wins without Joe Burrow, what kind of confidence does the team have?

“We have all the confidence in Jake. He’s a great player. Just look at what he did at Washington. He’s explosive, and we’re just feeding off of his energy and what he brings here.”

This win gets you back in the playoff hunt, beating a team that was ahead of you. Can you feel a difference in this locker room?

“Yeah, that’s the expectation here. Coach Taylor talks about that all the time. We know what we have to do — what we have to do to get in the playoffs — and we’re just going to keep stacking these wins one game at a time, one week at a time.”

**JONAH WILLIAMS
Tackle**

The offense has been on a roll the past two weeks with back-to-back 34-point games ...

“Jake (Browning) has been playing well, Zac (Taylor) has been calling a great game, and all of that together has been allowing us to put up almost 70 points the past two weeks.”

You’ve been through playoff runs before. Is momentum real?

“Absolutely. In 2021, I remember we were sitting here around this time — maybe it was a little before — but it we were like, ‘All right boys, we have to win out to make the playoffs,’ and it looked like an uphill battle at the time. But we did it and got all the way to the Super Bowl. We’re in a good position right now, and we just have to keep stacking these wins.”

Joe Mixon and Chase Brown give defenses a bit of a different look. Do you sense that at all?

“There’s sort of different elements of talent that we have. Mixon is a huge, physical back — one of the most physical backs in the league. And then we’ve got some of the speediest receivers in the league, and then there’s Chase Brown, who hits 22 miles-per-hour. It’s like we’re super variable on how can attack people. And like I said, Zac’s been calling great games with tons of variety. We’re keeping teams on their heels, and it helps us look good and to score points.”

You jumped out 14-0 and then it was 14-14. What was the mood at halftime after giving up that lead?

“I think we had a lot of belief. The way it felt on the field — I know there was a momentum swing with points — but the way we felt on the field (was that) we can control this game. We know we’re a better team, and we know we can win this game. That tipped interception and pick-six was kudos to them, but it’s not like a super dominant way to change the tide on us. It was kind of like bounce-bounce, quick play, and we knew we could go out and control the second half. The defense didn’t allow any points, and we put up 20 points in the second half.”

How much did that first drive in the second half show that you could get the game back under control?

“That was huge. We had the ball coming out of halftime. There was a bit of a point momentum swing right before the half, so we had to take a little pressure off of our defense and start extending our lead a little bit. We were able to do that in the second half.”



COLTS POSTGAME QUOTES

DEC. 10, 2023

INDIANAPOLIS AT CINCINNATI

SHANE STEICHEN

Head coach

Initial comments ...

"Alright, let's start. No injuries to report as of now. So, ready when you guys are."

Shane, do you think that was your worst performance of the season?

"Yeah, we've been talking about playing complimentary football the last couple of weeks and trying to put out great effort today. And a lot of self-inflicted stuff happened out there today. We have a drive going, and a penalty moves us back. We have another drive going, and another penalty moves us back. We have a holding call. A lot of that stuff — the punt, Ameer (CB Ameer Speed) runs into (WR Isaiah McKenzie). In that situation I was thinking, 'Jeez Louise.' It was a wild game. A lot of self-inflicted stuff that we have to get cleaned up going forward."

What do you think led to some of the self-inflicted things today that occurred uncharacteristically for you?

"I wish I had a great answer for you. I really do. It was just one of those days. It was not our day. And I have full confidence in that group that's in that locker room that we'll get it cleaned up going forward."

Did QB Gardner Minshew II get checked for a concussion at all?

"Not that I know of."

There was that sequence in the third quarter the Colts were driving, and you decline the personal foul. Could you share your thought process on that?

"Right there, it had been third-and-seven, or I think second-and-17. They were already in field goal range. So, it felt good, with our defense out there, to get a stop right here. And they're kicking a field goal anyway. So, it's second-and-18, and if they pop something, it's going to be a third-and-seven again, maybe. Who knows, right? So that was the decision that was made there."

Shane, did you feel this coming at all?

"Not at all. I thought we had a great week of preparation. I thought the guys were locked in. The energy was great in the locker room for the game ... the pre-game warmups — all that stuff — felt really good. And it wasn't our day, obviously."

Who do you lean on right now to clean up those self-inflicted wounds?

"Well, you lean on everyone in that locker room. Players and coaches, right? Obviously, the leaders on our team — those veteran leaders — and obviously the coaches as well, getting those things cleaned up. And really, like I said, a lot of self-inflicted stuff ... just penalties and critical situations. And it's a misfortune that stuff happened out there today. It's just kind of an avalanche of stuff that happened that we can't allow to happen moving forward."

We hear all the time about how games in December often are won in the trenches. That didn't go your way today. How much confidence do you have that you can get that part corrected?

"Obviously, like I said, today wasn't our day. Credit to Cincinnati. They did some good things and made some big plays. That's what it was."

Do you think this is a little bit of a trend? The running game, two weeks in a row — Jonathan Taylor is out obviously — but just not being able to get it going?

"Yeah, no, I don't know if it's a trend. Sometimes you have two weeks where it doesn't happen. The next week you might pop for 200 (yards). So, I don't have a great answer for you there. We're going to go back and watch tape. evaluate it and make sure we get a clean-up though, in a hurry."

What do you think has been the Bengals' success in screen passes today?

"I have to go back and look at the tape. But, yeah, they popped a few, and obviously some big ones that were explosive. So, I have to go back and look at the tape."

How did you see players like Rodney Thomas II step up today, especially with that pick six?

"Yeah, Rodney did a great job. Obviously, that was a huge momentum (shift) for us right there before the half, getting that pick. Again, I have to go back and look at the tape, but obviously getting an INT right there was big by Rodney."

Do you think that the screens maybe made it a little harder on the pass rush?

"I think it depends on situations. You're always have to be alert for screens, but when are they calling them on first-and-10, second pass situations? Who knows? But I think, they obviously hit the screens at the right time. You can hit those at the right time, and it looks like they did. I have to go back and watch the tape though."

Kicker Matt Gay had a couple struggles today. On that second one, it may have been the snap, right?

"I have to go back and look at the tape. I have no concerns about Matt. Obviously, we missed a PAT and a field goal, but I have full confidence in Matt."

The pass rush was pretty quiet today. Anything you can point to for that?

"I have to go back and look at the tape. But credit to Cincinnati. They did a good job protecting."

GARDNER MINSHEW II

Quarterback

When you guys can't get things going in the run game, do you think that holds the team back?

"Yeah, I think a few factors. We got behind a little bit, and that turned it up. The run was struggling a little bit. I think anytime you get one dimensional, it gives the other team an advantage."

What was your communication like with the offensive line today?

"I think we're all on the same page. Today wasn't what we're about and what we want to be about. A lot of self-inflicted wounds. We have to figure it out. We have to learn from this and grow. I think we should still have a lot of confidence in the body of work we put on tape this year and the work we've done together, so I think we're going to come together, get better and be ready to go next Saturday."

How out of character was the self-inflicted wounds for the team today?

"I think it definitely was out of character with what we've been doing these last few games — scrapping, fighting, clawing, and finding a way. Even there before that run where they got a holding, we thought we were going find a way to get back. I think everybody genuinely feels that way. Just have some things we have to clean up to put better ball on tape."

What do you think of the shift in the second half after Ronnie Harrison Jr. gets the pick six to tie the game, and why did it not carry on into the second half?

"I don't know. A play here and there going well, then we get a penalty. Just one thing or another. Wasn't anything or anybody. We all had mess-ups today. We have to tighten up, have that sense of urgency all week. We're playing important and meaningful ball right now, and we have to prepare that way."

On your first scramble it looked like you stumbled a little bit on the way up. Did you feel anything?

"I don't know if I did stumble. Maybe I did. I think that another guy might have stumbled too. But I felt good for getting hit by two dudes. It's not ideal, but all good."

You get that touchdown, and then two plays later a pick six. What did getting that momentum shift do for the sideline right before half?

"It was huge. It got us right back in position. One of the good things out there today, but I felt like we all genuinely believed that — no matter what, we were going figure it out and find a way. I think as long as you have that belief in yourself and the team, you're going to have a chance to win games."

Is it more frustrating because it was so self-inflicted?

"Absolutely. It's also encouraging, because we can go out and we can fix those things. If we do, we have a shot to be a really good team. We're going to double down this week in our process at practice and just continue to get better."

WILL MALLORY

Tight end

There was such a struggle to get the ball down field. What was the biggest thing Cincinnati was doing to contain you guys?

"Really at the end of the day, it's on us. We've got to correct our mistakes, and we can't beat ourselves. We're a good team, and we know what we're capable of doing, so we've got to clean stuff up and keep moving forward."

What was the message in the locker room right when you guys came off the field?

"We've still got everything we want right ahead of us, so we've just got to handle business this upcoming weekend. This one stings, but you've got to move on, and you just get ready for next Saturday."

You were one of the positive takeaways from this game with 46 yards. What was working for you?

"Whatever the limited snaps I get, I'm just planning on going in there and making a play, and doing whatever I can to help. There's a lot I've got to keep working on, but whenever I get in there I just want to help the team so I've just got to keep improving."

How were you able to exploit the Bengals defense?

"In two-minute we got some soft spots that we could hit, and we've got a talented room of tight ends, so we've got some good game plans for that. But like I said, I've just got to keep improving, and when your number gets called you've just got to make the play."

Mo Alie-Cox got the only touchdown. What was your reaction when you saw him in the end zone?

"Oh, it's awesome. It's great to see him — well, any of the tight ends it's great to see. Happy for him, and hope we get some more of those in the future for sure."

ZAIRE FRANKLIN

Linebacker

You guys had a lot of momentum going into the locker room at halftime. What changed over the course of the third quarter that gave Cincinnati such an upper hand?

"Credit to them. They came out, and obviously just went right down the field —big play — got a touchdown, and they just kept making play after play. For us, just executing like we could. We've just got to be better. We played a good team that was prepared, and we've just got to show up to the task."

With the magnitude of the playoff stakes at hand, how frustrating was it to have a situation where you're walking out with a loss?

"Obviously, we wanted to just keep that momentum going. It felt good to be on that streak, but at the end of the day, it's a week-to-week league, and we've got to be better next week, and got to treat wins and losses the same at this point. Thankfully, everything we want is still in front of us, and we still control our own destiny, but we've just got to keep it moving, get back to the drawing board and try and get a win on Saturday."

How difficult is it when it seems like so much of this game came down to missed opportunities and the self-inflicted wounds with all the penalties?

"It's tough. I feel like it's on us as leaders to keep the team grounded, to keep the team understanding that when you're playing capable teams late in the year the games mean more, the executions mean more, and we've got to play to the level that we know we're able to play at. I think we did that today with many failures, and we've just got to be better."

As a leader of this team, what is the message moving forward, and what do you share with the guys as you go into a tough, short week at home against the Steelers on Saturday night?

"At this point, we're all in shape, we all know we're capable, we all make plays, but it's just the mental endurance throughout the week to stay locked in, stay focused on the task, and Sundays or Saturdays, the team that makes the least amount of mistakes, the team that executes better is typically going to win the game. You go on that four-game winning streak, and you're just executing, and outlasting our opponents, and we've got to get back to that, keep trusting ourselves and our coaches, and play better."

Talk about the impact of Ronnie Harrison Jr., who had the pick-six and an interception two games prior ...

"Ronnie had a couple plays, tough plays early in the game. Right before that I told him 'I trust you, I got you.' We're out there, we're together — just a major play by him to affect the game like that. They always say we're defined by our ability to take the ball away and score, and he did that. Playmaking after playmaking, and it was a great game by him."

Cincinnati had almost 400 yards of offense. What was the most frustrating thing for you as a leader on the defense?

"To be honest, the screens and everything — that was frustrating. For us, we've just got to do better. We've got to execute better. They've got playmakers all over the field, and their guys showed up, and we didn't."

DeFOREST BUCKNER

Defensive tackle

Did the screen game make it that much harder to get to the passer?

"Definitely. It takes some relief off the quarterback and slows our pass rush. They did a good job of bringing in the play-action passes as well, moving the pocket a little bit, a couple full slides. We've just got to do a better job in one-on-one and just winning. It's hard, but they just played a better game than us today."

A lot of people have talked about self-inflicted wounds. Obviously, those can be cleaned up, so how encouraging is it that is something that can be bounced back from?

“Like you said, a lot of it was self-inflicted wounds — not tearing certain things back, or being out of your gap, or whatever it was — the run game or going against the screen. All those things we can learn from. We’ve got to take this one on the chin. It’s a short week, game on Saturday, and we play at home.”

When one thing works against a team, obviously other teams are going to use it against you guys ...

“We opened Pandora’s box today for sure with the screen game. We’ve got to go to the tape, we’ve got to look at our fits, and how we can turn the screens back inside to the guys pursuing the ball. We’ve got to put that fire out quick.”

Even though it’s tough to manage this, you guys as a pass rush have taken on a lot this season as a unit. Do you feel like you guys have to be the group that just finds a way?

“Oh yeah. We talk about it all the time, trying to be problem solvers out there and doing our job at a high level, and today we fell short of that. We’ve got to watch the film, get better from it, and keep going.”

As someone who is a veteran of playoff races, when you lose a game like this in December, what do playoff teams need to do to come back from this?

“It’s just the details. I feel like in all three phases, like you said, we had self-inflicted wounds. Whether we put ourselves in position to score, and we get a penalty here, a penalty there, or even defensively coming back and getting that defensive score late in the first half and coming back, and make it a 14-14 game. Obviously, they come out in the second half, hit some explosives and score. They’re self-inflicted wounds that we can fix.”

ZACK MOSS
Running back

Take us through when you think you score, it gets called back — do you think that was kind of indicative of the day you all had today?

“Yeah, every time we got something going we ended up kind of shooting ourselves in the foot a little bit, and any momentum we did have, we just kept fighting against them.”

What is the response in moments like that, and how frustrating is it that you couldn’t correct it today?

“I don’t know. We’ve been doing some good things, and today we just couldn’t figure it out.”

You’ve been on some playoff teams in the past. What do you think a team has to lean on in December to help you get back on track and make that push?

“I think fundamentals. We just can’t do stuff that’s going to hurt us. That’s really it. Things are going to happen in a game, but those self-inflicted ones, we just can’t have it. We’ve got to be better overall from every group.”

What was the message in the locker room after the game?

“Everything is still in front of us. Obviously, losing any game hurts — especially one that has a little extra magnitude to it. We’ve still got another chance. That’s the good thing about the NFL. We’ve still got four more guaranteed games, so we’ve still got a chance to do everything we want to do. We’ve just got to get ready for Pittsburgh on a short week.”

What’s the balance of frustration on the self-inflicted wounds, but also it’s encouraging knowing it was self-inflicted and a lot of the stuff is correctable?

“I don’t know. That’s a great question, but I don’t know how to answer that until we watch the film, honestly. We got whooped, and we didn’t help defeat it either, so that’s all that was.”