COACH FLECK: Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for joining us, for being here. Appreciate you all being here. Big rivalry week. Excited to play Iowa this week. I know you got a lot of questions, so with that, we'll open up for questions.

Q. What were some of your overall impressions of the Maryland game?
COACH FLECK: Yeah, we did a lot of good. We did a lot of not so good. I told before they play - - it's almost like playing the option, right? There is a dive, a pitch, and all these other things. When you miss one tackle, that's when you saw the big plays happen. We just didn't make the plays. We missed tackles. Missed three big tackles that led to huge runs.

I'm not going to say missing Antoine Winfield Jr. Didn't hurt us. He's our best football player. Everything we do on a DR defense is funneled to make sure he is the guy and the extra guy to make the play where he needs to make it.

Behind them are very, very young players, and that's a position we got caught in. We've got to learn from it, get better. Got to give Maryland a lot of credit. They're a very good football team. Very good. Those quarterbacks are very talented, and their defense was the best defense we played in the front seven.

I thought Zack wasn't able to get out of the pocket with his ankle, and that's my fault. Again, they knew that and they kept him in the pocket and he had no place to escape or step up. That's part of fighting through and fighting through your injury.

You know, again, you got to give them a lot of credit. Really good football team. Very talented. We showed them in the bye week exactly -- from the four games; not just the loss. There were a lot of things I didn't like when we played Miami Ohio.

We showed them we could've easily lost this game because of this, this, this, and this. Then we showed them again in Maryland. Could have easily won if it was in this, this, this, and this. It's not necessarily letting the result or the score dictate, a loss is a loss; a win is a win.

But how we got to that point is what we dissect I as coaches. We don't look at end result. You want the end result to be in your favor, but you've got to educate and continue to teach. Those are the things we pulled from that game.

Give them a lot of the credit.

Q. When you're trying to upgrade your talent, seems like you can recruit speed but you have to build strength. How many off-season cycles do you guys need to take to get
where you want to be on your line?
COACH FLECK: That's a great question, a great question. I talked about when you recruit you recruit speed but don't really develop strength until they get here, grown-man strength. We have one guy on the team I think has grown-man strength as a youngster. His name is Daniel Faalele. He might be the strongest person on our team naturally. 6'9", 400-pounder from Australia. He's just an incredibly strong guy. He's only got to get stronger, which is scary.

You can get the speed in here, but it takes a few cycles to be able to go through, right? Remember, there are 33 freshmen on our team. These are kids who have not been in our program more than one year, and some only been here three months. They're 18 years old.

To sit there and say they're a grown man now, that's silly. Now, that's what's on our team right now. We started I think eight freshmen. Iowa starts one. We start eight, and a lot of those guys are true freshmen. So when you start to look at these guys and the strength of what they look like, they're going to look really good.

But they look -- they're high school seniors plus is the way I always describe them. They're a fifth year high school players. That's what they actually are. You'd like to redshirt them all. That's not a position we are in.

We have to have guys that do play, and then we've got to have a lot of guys who do the four-year redshirt rule. It's going to take a while to get that strength to where it needs to be.

Q. Seemed like you showed up with Maryland, and look at their defensive line, just pure strength against some of your young guys.
COACH FLECK: It was. I'm glad you see that. That's reality. One thing is I'll never lie to anybody. This is reality, right, of where we're at.

Now, that doesn't mean you can't win football games, but the facts are the facts. The analogy I think the other day it's like having 14 to 15 NFL rookies playing at one time. You'd look at the GM and owner and be like, What are you doing? Are you serious right now?

That's the position we're in for a lot of different reasons, but that's okay. I said from day one when I got the job, year two we're going to get a lot younger before we become more experienced. Hope you all remember that. Said it numerous times.

Now we're younger. We're the youngest team in America, or third most inexperienced team in the country. But that's okay. You lose your best offensive player, your best defensive player, it's still okay. It's opportunities for Jordan Howden to grow and Benny Sapp to grow. They're going to play a lot of football here eventually. Now they got to do it now maybe before they're ready to do it.

Bryce Williams or a Mohamed Ibrahim. I could go on and on. Jake Paulson at tight end. Even Blaise Andries at the offensive line position.

But this just one big recruiting class. Really the only big one we brought in. Remember, when we got here we had three weeks to recruit; that's one.
So as we continue to go and continue to recruit the way we recruit and the talent level we continue to get in, and then develop them in our culture, I mean, this is going to be really, really fun and really special.

Again, this is fun, too. I enjoy this part. I enjoy the building part. I enjoy this part. That doesn’t mean you can’t win. We’re 3-1. Everybody -- the amount of text messages I got after that Maryland game. Everybody is like, Ah, you know. We were picked 12 out of 14 in the big 10. Like what’s the text for, you know?

But our team believes in each other, they believe in our culture, they believe in our program, they believe in what they’re doing, and they have become incredibly tight and close. That doesn’t fix a strength issue, but as coaches we’ve got to be very creative on how we can as we said before, manipulate points, create points, get points on the board, and obviously stop them on defense.

It’s been a lot of fun. As a teacher and an educator I love it. When they become seniors they know a lot of it. You’re still coaching, you’re developing, but you’re also managing, too. When they’re so young you’re coaching and educating every day and they’re learning every day. It’s a lot of fun.

Q. Without Antoine, how important is Jacob back there?

COACH FLECK: He’s very important. Jacob Huff is really important for us back there. He’s the guy in the secondary has played a ton of football. Him and Antonio Shenault. They’ve got to really step up the leadership. They’re going to have a lot of young people around them any way you cut it from this point forward. There will be youngsters everywhere in that secondary.

Again, it’s okay. It’s okay to be young. There are things that come along with being young, but they have to step up their leadership. When our players look at those guys they need to say, I want to be like him. That puts even more pressure on them of everything they do, from how they respond, to how they walk, how they talk, what they say, how loud they say it, their actions.

That’s all being looked at. It’s under a microscope by all of our young players. If you’re an upper classman on this team, I mean our youngsters got their microscopes out looking at everything you do, and so they’ve got to set the example way better than they ever have.

Q. (Regarding Antoine.)

COACH FLECK: He is an unbelievable young man. Even when we were out there -- and he knew something was wrong. He goes, That’s football. I mean, when you have a dad that plays in the NFL for 14 years you kind of see some things that happen. He understands this is a violent game; it’s a contact sport; you got to hustle injuries.

There are two things that happen with his injury, is either your foot breaks or you tear that ligament. He tore the ligament in his foot. But he plays the game the right way. He respects the game. I think eventually really good things are going to happen to him. The restoration is going to come around for him, because now he’s a redshirt redshirt freshman.
Look, you see Rashod Bateman over there? He's like, Yeah. He's a good player. You're in his class. You're the only person in this class that's getting younger.

But he has a great attitude. Very positive. He got a chance to go home for a little bit right after surgery which I know his mom was really excited to see him. Just always smiling; he's got such a positive attitude. Doesn't mean it doesn't affect him. It's affecting him. But he makes sure it's affecting him and he's showing it in a positive way how to handle an injury.

When you're the best player and all the young guys are looking at you, he's handling it with such maturity. That's what you want to see out of one of your best players, and not only that, one of your best people and your leader.

Q. Regarding Howden
COACH FLECK: Yeah, I mean, any time you're a true freshman you get thrown in, and not only that you got to replace Antoine Winfield, Jr., that's a lot of pressure put on you. One thing we keep telling all the young players is you don't have to be anybody else but yourself. We don't want you to be anybody else but yourself.

We want you to be the best version of you that position, period. At the end of the year we'll evaluate that. Right now just go. Just go, work, and be the best version of yourself you could possibly be academically, athletically, socially, spiritually, and make sure you fit into those four areas emotionally, physically, and mentally.

All four of those things have to have the other three. They all have to be burning at the right height, which is very difficult for the newness of it all. That's why I gave you the best analogy I could. Maybe 15 rookies and one NFL team. Just doesn't sound like it makes any sense. 33 freshman doesn't sound right either. There is a lot of reasons why the depth chart and the roster is that way. We've only been here 18 months, or 19, 20 months. We've got a lot of work to do.

Q. What impressed you about Iowa in that Wisconsin game?
COACH FLECK: Good thing is we got to watch both teams. I would say this. This is a complete -- I would say this is a respectful comment to Iowa and a compete compliment to them. They do what they do and they do what they do very well, probably better than any other team I've ever watched in terms of they are who they are. They don't stem far away from who they are, and they execute at such a high level offensively and defensively.

Defensively they keep everything in front of you. They've got big, long, tall rangy, string defense lineman, active line backers, and they tackle probably better than any team I've watched.

And then offensively they do everything they can. It's not a secret. They're going to run the football. Stanley is a tremendous quarterback staying in the pocket, throw it, he can get out, he's tough to bring down. He's a surprisingly big kid.

They're going to run the football, but then they've got two of the best tight ends you'll ever see. They might have one of the first tight ends taken in the draft coming up here, and they use him in all the nakeds and all the boots, all the play-action passes, the deep crosses, the deep overs.
And it doesn't matter if he's covered or not. He reminds me of Fumagalli at Wisconsin. Didn't matter if you were on him or not. He's so big, so rangy, so strong that if he's not open, he's still open. That's makes them so hard to defend. They have great size, skill, and their offensive line is really tough.

And their special teams, they work really hard at it; you can tell. They're a very good football team.

Q. (Regarding coaching at one school for 20 years.)
COACH FLECK: Yes, I think you'll see a coach for 20 years at another school. I do believe that. I think that is the right thing to do. I've always believed that. Here is why I say that, and this is in all due respect. These are facts. We are 4 out of 31. We are 4 and 27 in the last 15 years in our rivalry games.

What's the difference between those and the two big rivalry games we have? You have one coach who turned into an athletic director at one point and has been there over 37 years. That's the same culture that he created. That when they stopped making excuses, as he would say, it made their program elite at some point. Took them four or five years to get to that point.

And then Iowa, I mean, if you take Hayden Fry and Kirk Ferentz, probably the same type of culture. Hayden Fry had some of the greatest staffs ever in the history of college football, right?

And the seeing what Kirk Ferentz has done, I mean, that's two coaches in almost a half century. When you look at how many coaches we've had in just 12 years, how can you get to that point with new offense every year or every other year or two years, new defenses, new specialties, new coaches, new head coach, new culture, new identity, new reads, new offense, new systems, new players, new beliefs of what they should recruit, how can you expect to do that?

The reason why they're so successful is they have had the same system, the same coaches, the same people that they can recruit to and develop in the same strength staff.

That's what -- so that's why I hopefully say yes. I optimistically say yes -- and that's more my positive, hoping side -- that people do see that. That's how you do that. If people think just take a pill or hire a coach and you immediately win, you need to look around the country right now. Some people think it just happens. Not in 2018. Not the way recruiting is. Not the way facilities are, and as you said money is. It's not.

Or the rotation of presidents or the rotation of athletic directors. It's not that way, but I hope that it can be. I think it's really healthy for college football. I do. I think we set an example for our young people of doing that. I just want to say that I wish Paul Molitor all the best. Became pretty close to him. It's a shame that he lost his job today.

Like you said, Coach, got to win. Us coaches know we have to win. Again, at what cost, right? We're here, and I laid out -- when we got here we laid out this whole plan from year one, year, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. Before I got hired I said, This is what it looks like. Now, if you don't like this, please do not hire me. This is the way I know how to do it from the people who raised me and my experience as a head coach.
So I'm never in charge of my own time frame, but no coaches are. You've got to find a way. How are you going to win and what do you believe in and how do you define winning, right? I believe you got to have winners before you can win, on the field, off the field, in every area of their life.

I've proven exactly what I've said. I'm not afraid to get younger. The one thing about young people is they don't stay young very long. Eventually they get older. Again, we're building it from that point.

**Q. What's Zack's health today and how close to 100...**
COACH FLECK: He's getting closer to 100. I'm not really good with the percentages. Math was not my strong suit. I would probably give him somewhere 85, 90%. He's getting closer to being healthy, 100%. You can't really tell as much as you could before. He's running all the nakeds and boots and spread-outs and all the things, so he looks really good.

**Q. Having played Iowa at Western, anything different playing them as part of a rivalry?**
COACH FLECK: First time I played them I think beat us by 70. That was a long day. No, I don't think there is, because cultural sustainability is so strong. Kirk Ferentz is one of the best college coaches in the history of college football. You know what you're going to get when you play Iowa whether you're in Iowa City or here in Minneapolis or Kalamazoo, Michigan, you know what you're going to get. I think that's what makes them really special. You know exactly what you're going to get behind that brand all the time. A lot of brands change that every three years and you don't necessarily know what you're going to get. With Iowa you always know what you're going to get. That's a complete compliment to them.

**Q. Against Maryland we saw Bateman was a major part of the offense. They were taking Tyler away a little bit. How important is it to establish him as a second option?**
COACH FLECK: Yeah, he's almost our leading receiver by now. He's becoming the second option very quickly, if not the first option. We brought him here to play. I think he's kind of shown what he can do at times. I think he's showed his youth at times as well. Again, he's very mature. He grows up pretty quickly and he's so talented.

So, yes, as we keep getting older and we keep getting more experienced -- I'm not talking years, I'm talking every day. These guys grow up every single day. We need him to play at an extremely high level. He is.

The relationship between him and Zack is really becoming very strong, as well as Chris Autman-Bell. Chris Autman-Bell made some catches that I don't know how anybody makes. That's what he has to do, and then that can take the pressure off Tyler and now all of a sudden you have more weapons.

These guys are doing that for the first time, so, again, they're going to succeed, fail, go through this whole thing. The one thing when you have a young team, the one thing you worry about as a head coach when you have a very young team is consistency. So many things in their life are
so inconsistent right now. It's not routine for them. They haven't adapted to all that yet, including school. New friends new team, new area of the country away from mom and dad. Those aren't excuses. That's just the reality we look at, especially when at the start dealing with our mental health coaches.

We're very aware of all that for our players because we know exactly what they're going through. Part of protecting your team is being proactive in everything. Once it's done you can't protect them anymore. It's done, whatever that is. Being proactive in all that.

But Rashod Bateman is a tremendous player and wonderful person, and he's going to have a bright future here starting today and tomorrow.

Q. You said couple weeks ago when Zack did get hurt he was maybe back pedaling more in the pocket. Was that a pocket against Maryland?
COACH FLECK: A little bit. I thought he was a lot better but then he couldn't move. He was better, he hung in there, but then the pressure was on him so quickly that he got sacked a little bit more.

There are times where he is throwing some screens, right, that he's off the back foot. Yes, I thought he's done a better job stayed in the pocket, stepping into it, but there are two out of four games he's been injured. It's hard to evaluate that.

I thought he still stepped back in the first two games, but also showed that he could step in and step up and also create on the run. One thing we were missing from him last game was the ability to create on the run. When the play breaks down or protection breaks down, get out of the pocket and go. He's shown he's really good at.

That's one of the things you kind of deal with when you go through some tough situations with some injuries. He's grown from it. He knows. Even if you're not as mobile as you are, you've got to get the ball out of your hand, be able to throw it away. Got to be able to somehow get out of that pocket somehow and also step up and run.

There have been plenty of opportunities where I thought he could've pulled it down and ran. Again, if you're not feeling as well as you need to feel, 100%, it's hard to expect somebody to do that.

Q. Was that more his ankle limiting him?
COACH FLECK: Here is the thing. It's just like anything with youth, right? He's played in four games, and until last week it was three games. When you get hit early, now if you're a senior you know how it feels to be hit early. Get on your offensive line and usually they're usually experiences and, boom, you guys change it.

When you get hit early as a young guy plus you're hurt, I think it affects you a little bit. We have to be able to keep him upright. He got hit early often, plus he was hurt. Again, hurt. I mean his ankle was bothering him, I should say.

But it's one of those things where if you keep them off him early maybe he has a lot more
success and feels a lot more comfortable on the pocket. Again, it's part on us in terms of it was hard to be able to move him. As we continue to go, we got to get back to all the things we were doing with him, and especially in game three how we moved him a little bit more.

The game plan was until he got hurt. Now we have to be able to do that as we go forward.

Q. Kiondre Thomas available?
COACH FLECK: Yes, he is.

Q. What's your level of concern about the run defense right now, stopping the run?
COACH FLECK: I thought we stopped the run really well in three games and didn't in one game. Again, I've said exactly kind of how we feel why we didn't tackle well, and we had some guys in some situations that maybe they weren't ready for.

That's okay. We've got to fix it. I thought our run defense was tremendous. I think we were only giving up nine points a game first three games, and we get to Maryland and it happened very fast. Big plays are a big part of that, and it's one missed tackle. Against them, you miss one tackle, you don't have a second level. They don't miss a tackle up the defensive line.

Then linebacker misses a tackle, your secondary misses a tackle. Swarming to the football against Maryland is very difficult to do because they play you so gap sound and they gap you out. Everybody is responsible for that gap and that's all I have to do. You're the one person in that gap. If that gap isn't there, it's a touchdown that's what you saw. Didn't do a good job of that.

Again, we got to get him in better positions. We got to be more creative in terms of our personnel, how we're able to move people around. And then they've got to show they can do it.