COACH FLECK: Onward and upward. That's what we're doing. So we're moving forward on into Indiana. Short week. We were able to cover the Nebraska game, see what we did well, what we didn't do well, get with our players, and solidify and look at a lot of the issues that we have of why we have those things and get them corrected. This week's a little bit different the way we practice, just because it is a short week based on how we came out of the game, just with injury-wise, it just affects a lot of the things we do in practice but we'll handle it really well and make sure come Friday our guys are ready to go and they're ready to go.

Indiana is a really good football team they've played a lot of people really close. They've got a lot of speed on offense. Their quarterback's really accurate. He's a runner. He's a thrower. He's a dynamic player on the defensive side of the ball.

You look at they play a ton of players. Up front they could play as many as 15 defensive linemen as they continue to rotate guys in.

They play extremely hard. Well coached. Coach Allen does a great job with the defense. Offensive side of the ball tremendous wide receiver. The offense collectively played together, running back is big strong and physical. They do great job in special teams. Another challenge for our football team. Looking forward to it Friday night under the lights. Should be really exciting.

Q. What's the update on Zack's health and the chances he plays Friday?
COACH FLECK: I can't give you a percentage just yet. It's only a day and a half really after the game. For us to say exactly what's going to happen, I'd be guessing. He's had a few things wrong with him when he was taken out. So I don't make those calls. The doctors and trainers do. But I'm glad we have the doctors and trainers we have, because they would rather do something that's extensive and protect rather than say, yeah, he's fine, which they took him to the hospital, did that, got him back quickly after they found out some of the things were negative. But I give him a lot of credit.

If I'm a family member of somebody on our team, you know that you have the right trainers, doctors, who are caring for your son. But he's doing well. Doing well. Seems like Zack.

Q. What did you like about Tanner's performance after going back --
COACH FLECK: It was gritty. Gutsy. It's what he is. We have two freshmen quarterbacks. I thought Tanner went in there does what Tanner does. Gave us a little bit more with his feet. Able to run the option, escape the pocket. Run. Pick up first down here and there. Get some extra yardages even on first down make second and second and short, which how well you are -- how good you are on third down really has to do with how good you are on first down. If you're in a lot of second and nines and second and eights, it's going to be really difficult for you to be a high efficiency third down team.

I thought he went in there and owned the team, commanded the team, led the team, and that's what we expect when we put him in there. 22 unanswered points.
That's pretty good being able to be down 28-0 and come back 22 points unanswered. We weren't able to sustain what we were doing defensively at that time. So I give our kids a lot of credit. We are growing in a lot of areas. I know you only see the wins and losses and that's your job and you report really well on all those things.

When you look at our football team and what we're accomplishing, there's seven or eight, depending how you look at it, starters on offense are freshmen. Watching their performance -- and Rashad Bateman, five, six, seven catches away from the freshman record already. That's just a freshman.

We have the second-leading receiver in the Big Ten with Tyler Johnson. On the defensive side, Carter Coughlin leads the Big Ten in sacks. There's a lot of positive things happening. 474 yards. That's the second of the -- that's the second-most in the season.

When you look at the 350 yards passing, that's the most in a decade in Big Ten play with Minnesota. So we're making huge strides, huge strides with a very, very young offense. And you'll be able to see, remember the younger you are, the bigger strides you make when you see from day to day and week to week.

Look at Adrian Martinez, he played the best game of his freshman year against us, for a lot of different reasons. There's only a matter of time, I told you, that he's going to break out. Talking about one of the possible Heisman Trophy winners. I will say that because he's that talented. Up close, you saw him on film, each week just getting better and better and better. And his margin to get better is really big because he's such a young player.

I'm proud of the progress we're making in a lot of areas. Defensively, we missed 18 tackles. Everybody wants to talk about -- you remember I talked about three things: There's the schematic part. There's a coaching part and there's a personnel part. Those are three columns that I always look at no matter what. All sides of the ball.

When you look at schematics, and we're in position to make a ton of plays, we don't make plays. We don't make tackles.

And you know we've done a lot of things as a head coach, on my way, to be able to sit there say why do I say everything's my fault? I'm responsible for everything in the program. You say we got to stop number two, your entire game plan is around number two. Sometimes when it's just around number two, it stresses some of the things that you might not necessarily be really good at. But you have to do that to at least have a chance to stop them.

Teams are smart. You see a lot of teams getting a lot of bunch, clusters, letting our secondary make plays in the run game on the outside and we're not able to make those at this time.

And so a lot of the tackles came from that area. And those are three touchdowns like that. You miss one tackle, and it's your gap, your responsibility. That's what happens.

So that's going to happen. That's going to be fixed through recruiting, through development. Hopefully maybe getting guys back. Shenault might not play this week. You've got T-Time just returning. And Antoine Winfield, Jr. out for the season. I told you at the beginning of the year, depending on how healthy our secondary stays, depends on really the strength of our defense. I think that's what I said at the beginning.
I like our front seven. We stop the run with our front seven. But again people are really smart. Not going to have your front seven stop them. That's where you see a lot of clusters, bunches, things like that, forcing our secondary guys to be in the run game. We haven't been able to execute with that.

So again that's being addressed through development. That's being addressed by other guys playing. That's going to be addressed highly -- it has been with Jordan Howden and Terell Smith, but also huge emphasis in 2019 recruiting as we finish up the class. We know that.

But again that's part of the process. That's what you know when you walk in. That's what you know you have to fix.

And we knew offensive line when we got here and defensive backs were going to be things we had to really fix and develop as we continued to go forward. People are smart. Not giving anybody any hints or secrets about our defense. That's what they're doing. As an offensive coach, you look at how the defense, what you can exploit, what weaknesses can you exploit.

And a defensive coach, you look at how can you hide your weaknesses.

Q. Is it some experienced guys, though, whether it's Durr, Shenault, Huff, experienced guys in that secondary, that are missing plays, missing tackles?
COACH FLECK: Shenault didn't play the whole game. Got hurt early. Didn't play.

Q. Saturday, looking at the totality of the year?
COACH FLECK: When you lose your best player, and everything is designed around your best player and number 11, when you lose him and you have some experience but everything else around -- remember we play five, six DBs. We can't play five, six DBs right now. We're playing majority in base because we don't have enough defensive backs. When you start getting into that part, yes, we're talking about maybe they're not freshmen, but they're very youthful, inexperienced players.

Some of them. And so whether you're talking youth or inexperience, like I said before coming into the year, they're almost hand in hand. And this is still, for some of those guys, remember, 50 some percent are freshmen. So this might be year two with us being here. But the majority of our offense, it's their first year playing in that system.

So when you start to look at all that, those aren't excuses, those are facts. And we have to be better. We have to continue to find ways as coaches to be able to put our players in the best position to be successful. And we will.

And but again as we're doing it, and part of it, like I said that is my responsibility. You're putting a Band-Aid over the thing. Robbing Peter to pay Paul to stop something but you'll be short in a different area. You're fixing problems that create problems. And you hope they don't find that out quickly. They're a very good coaching staff. We'll continue to make them better. It's part of the development we talked about. It's a process.

Q. Any change in Shannon Brooks' status this week?
COACH FLECK: As of right now, no change. He is practicing. But it's still evolving. I wish I had a better answer for you, Randy, I really do. It's evolving.

Q. Can Seth Green play quarterback, if he had to, is he at a point where you would be comfortable with him?
COACH FLECK: If we got to that point, yes. I don't think that's a secret, just based on what we do with him in the wildcat, if we ever got in the position where we didn't have two quarterbacks, Seth Green, he would be the emergency quarterback at that position.

I think we'd scale some things down. Because he's not in that room anymore. He's with the wideouts. He has a portion of the week he's with Coach Ciarrocca doing his wildcat work, plus doing his wideout work with Coach Simon, which they kind of implement both into the running game as well. So I've been very, very pleased with the amount of work he's been able to give us.

And there's two plays. There's two fourth downs. One is fourth and two we don't get with a lack of communication where our tight end goes the wrong way, and we get hit, unblocked guy coming off the edge, there's no chance we have it. We run the same play on the fourth and one again and we get eight yards. We block it correctly.

Again, it's that communication. It's that over communicating. It's being able to master something knowing no matter what we'll get that done. But Seth Green, I think he's playing at a high level. Caught that pass down there. Running the ball, throwing the ball. Thank goodness we have him. And like I said he could be the third quarterback sitting there. And that was our whole conversation. Do you want to get on the field or do you want to sit there?

That's why I always tell our players we're going to have very honest conversations. You might not like what I say initially, but let's talk about after what I say. And that was a perfect example of Seth Green. He's been one of our most valuable players on offense.

He could be sitting on the bench right now. And we're finding creative ways to generate offense.

Q. You played a lot of off coverage in recent weeks. What's the thought process there?

COACH FLECK: Limit big plays. Remember you have to have the ability as head coach to do that. They can do that for 60 minutes against those receivers. We've proven at times we can and we've proven at times we can't. When you get into a position you want to keep everything in front of you. When we do go man coverage, again, at times, like we saw in the run game, it comes down to one guy. That one guy misses a tackle, whoever that is, and it's a 60-yard touchdown.

So especially when you're in bump and run. So we have to mix it up. Like I said we've got to continue to develop, the defensive backs we have in this program and continue to recruit at a very high level to bring them here to be able to play.

Q. Can you explain a little bit with the quarterbacks and the run game, was Zack giving it more because that's the read Tanner was giving more because of the reader, or was it is different design things?

COACH FLECK: That's a great question. Zack Annexstad is incredibly tough. The kid's been playing on an injured foot since game two and badly injured. The kid wants to play and they allowed him to play. He can play he's just limited.

And when you saw him against Fresno State he's all over the place. He's making scrambles, makes one of the plays of the year and all of a sudden you hurt your ankle to a severe part, two different types of injuries.

It can take some time to get healed. And when Tanner got in there opened up a little bit more. You can see what we're missing with that.
So it just depends. Zack's got to be able to heal up. I mean, the guys battled for seven games as a true freshman and he's taken a beating but he's also made incredible plays. He's led our football team. He's a tough, tough young man. Both players are tough.

When you have a tough quarterback you can have a tough team. When you have two tough young quarterbacks, that's even better. As you start moving forward on the offensive side. But what I do like offensively is you look across the board, Demetrius Douglas makes unbelievable plays, kicking game and offense. Scores his first touchdown. Chris Autman-Bell, really good game. Look at Ty Johnson, 184 yards that's the most since Eric Decker. You're talking -- we're becoming and you're all seeing what it is. And I respect all that you say and think because I understand that, but I know where we're going. And it's really exciting to coach this football team because as an educator/teacher I know where we're going.

We might not be there right now. We might not be there today where everybody wants us to be today. But we will be there eventually. But I can see it. And you can see bits and pieces of it. But when we talk about youth on offense that just means inconsistency. That's why we talk about being mature. What you have to be is what you want to do. It's all about consistency, getting to know yourself, getting to know yourself in that environment.

One thing I love about those young players, 92,000 people, that didn't affect anybody on that field. And that's what I'm looking for as a head coach, when you've got 35 young people, freshmen, on your team.

Because once you lose, let's say you lose a Coughlin or a Kamal, those are all freshmen right behind there. So you're playing these guys 70, 80, 90 snaps a day practicing them and you're getting these other people ready. These other people behind them aren't ready. True freshmen. But they're going to have to play. And that's kind of some of the positions we're in.Defensively, there's four freshmen that played defensively this past game. But this is still only their seventh game they've played. They might not be a freshman, this is their first year playing.

So it's up to the Cashmans and Coughlins and the Kamals and Thomas Barbers to really anchor that defense. And I think they're playing at a high level. We've got to get everybody else around them to play at that level, faster than when they probably should be. And that's the challenge we have.

Q. Speaking of Friday night games, how much does it impact your preparation during the week?
COACH FLECK: I'm used to it as a head coach. I played in in the MAC. It was like Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, back to a Wednesday, four-day rest, nine-day rest. That was fun. The fifth game of the year, you were mid-week all the time on a different day. Short weeks. Long weeks. It hasn't affected us at all.

I think we have a really good plan based on all the data we have of what we've done in the past and what we've done and what we've accomplished and what is the best for the student-athlete, academically, athletically, socially, spiritually.

Remember, these guys have a short week in football but they're still going to school. Most of our guys, when we travel to our hotel on Thursday night, they're in class all night and then they get over to the hotel.

Different challenges that you look at. And everything is proactive. Here's what it looks like. Here's what we're doing. Here's why we're doing it, so everybody knows and there's no surprises.
Q. Does it concern you at all that it kind of horns in on high school football on Fridays?
COACH FLECK: I think for attendance, absolutely. I'm a firm believer in high school football is played on Fridays. College football is played on Saturday. And NFL is played on Sunday. I think Monday night football. I'm a huge believer of that. But I don't run TV.

So it's TV-driven, we know that. And if that's what's best for TV and they're making the calls, then we'll play anywhere. We shouldn't sit there and say we don't want to -- we're excited about playing Friday night.

Q. What have you seen on Scott, Indiana's running back?
COACH FLECK: He's big, he's strong. We recruited him. I think he's really talented. You can tell he reminds me, I don't like to do comparisons, when we had Jarvion Franklin really our first year at Western Michigan, and he was -- they remind me of each other. Six foot one. 235 pounds. Big. Physical. A little bit like Nebraska's back. But he's a young kid. And he's doing well. And you can tell he's growing every single week. He's just getting better. Because when you're young, that growth is so much. Really good player. Good in pass pro.

Q. One of the unique things you did on Sunday with the coin toss captain, and why did you have Tanner have that?
COACH FLECK: It was so late, and I like everybody running out of the tunnel together and then we'll do our captains but we were coming out like 2:30. And they need the captains prior to 2:30.

So I thought, okay, Tanner was the backup quarterback let him go out there he knows the calls we're going to make. Let him go out there and let the team run out with the team. That's the way we handled that.

Q. How do you explain Tyler Johnson losing focus in one or two drops a game, he'll make some catches that just take your breath away, 184 yards speaks for itself?

COACH FLECK: If I had all the answers for it, it would have been fixed weeks ago. Because it's happened over the course of the last six, seven weeks. One thing I've always -- I've had people with us before. I don't make it a big issue. When you make something a big issue, it becomes bigger. Just naturally.

He knows what he has to be able to do to get better. He's been told what he needs to be able to do to fix that issue, how to be able to do that. Because there's a reason. Whether it's hand position or whether it's not catching enough balls, not catching enough of that type of balls, because again when is it? It's coming back into the quarterback.

Hardest ball to catch. If I took you out there and you and I had a one-on-one session with you and I was coaching you, you'd have a better chance of catching balls breaking outside and away from a quarterback. There's more time to see it. There's more distance between you and the quarterback. The ball's moving away. Balls are moving into you quicker. And so anytime like slants or digs or end routes, they're a little bit more difficult to be able to catch those. And they're not difficult catches for him.

But his hand positioning, when we zone in on the film, is a little off. We can fix that. And then just repetition, repetition. Train, behavior, becomes instinct. The more habits you create, the more instincts you're going to have. You have to build a habit before you can build an instinct. It's the constant those.
It's not just running 20 yards on each play after practice just to catch that, but run three yards and have a Jugs machine continue to shoot balls at you. Catch 150 a day. Again, you know you're working on that. Then it's not an issue.

But again I do everything -- being a wideout, there's a mental part of that. And you've got to be very delicate in how you're handling that, because he's an exceptional player when he makes the plays. He's becoming a complete player.

But those one or two at times are killing us in drives. But he's one of our best players. So we've got to find a way to be able to get him to break through that wall. There's a small little mental or emotional wall right there, we've got to break through that.

But it's not like it's every third play. It's usually once a game. And it's usually around the right position, same position and breaking in. So we have talked about it at length, taught about it at length, now he's repping it at length. Hopefully that continues to come down.

Q. Since Winfield has gone down, opposing offensive coordinators seemingly have been picking on that safety, replacing him. How do you go about fixing that with five games remaining?

COACH FLECK: Great question. What we have to be able to do is personnel. We can go a few different routes here.

As we continue to go, Jordan Howden, our freshman, has got to play. But again you're playing a true freshman who's had some ups and downs this year.

Maryland wasn't exactly the greatest game for the young man. He's got to bounce back from that mentally. He hasn't been in the weight room. You can see the strength difference between the running back from Nebraska and our guys tackling those guys.

He'll be a different player next year. But we need him now to do that. What we have to be able to do is protect that. Like I said, what we were doing was we were fixing problems to create a problem.

Well, let's stop fixing problems. Let's be us. Let's make people earn it. And let's stop saying, okay, we've got to take away this and this and this. Let's play our style of defense that we know how to play before we've got into, okay, well, this guy went down and that guy went down now we've got to protect this guy because he's not ready.

Ready or not here we come. I mean it's like red rover, red rover and we're going. Red rover send Jordan Howden over. Whether you're ready or not, we're sending you over. And our coaches will get him ready. If he fails, he'll grow. If he succeeds, he'll grow. And this is the only chance we have to make people better is by experience, because come next year they're going to have to be ready to play at a very, very high level.

And that's not to say this year they don't have to be. But frustration happens when your experience doesn't match your expectation. I don't have an expectation of Jordan Howden being an All-American right now so I'm not frustrated.

Other people are frustrated. But I'm not frustrated. He is who he is right now and that's the best he can give us as an example. There's other people in the secondary that that's their expectation because
that's where they are right now.

I don't have unrealistic expectations of people who can or cannot do something. And your experience like we're having doesn't match the expectation everyone else has, that's when everybody gets up in arms and they're frustrated about it. That's not how coaches work.

Coaches work day to day, how is he better today than he was yesterday? Because over the long haul he's going to be a very special player. But it's very hard to be able to sit there and say, okay, you get to learn under No. 11. No, you don't. Now you've got to start. Because behind that there wasn't like we had 12 deep back there. For many different reasons.

So when you look at that, we have to make sure that we play our style of defense, keep a cap to the defense as much as possible. Keep everything in front of us. When they come in front we've got to tackle it because plenty of opportunities we've made but we haven't made the tackle in the back end. 18 missed tackles that's our most all year. That's why you get 53 points. It wasn't like people were like just running scot-free.

The last play was the one that -- again, freshmen bit up. And the guy went right behind him. But again he hasn't seen that before. Now he's going to understand a little bit more how to do that. I was such a horrible player my freshman year. But I was really good my junior and senior year. But I was horrible my freshman year.

We're expecting so much out of these young kids -- or let me restate that, or first-year experience players that we're having. Because it's not just youth -- youthful people. I've said youth and inexperience all year. Whether you want to call it the youngest team or most inexperienced team, they go hand in hand.

You can be the youngest team in America but you can have a ton of experience and your ton of experience is everywhere. And your youth is right behind everybody deep. We're not in that position. We're youthful and inexperienced at a lot of positions. Not an excuse. Those are facts. We've got to get it done. The expectation is to get it done we did not get it done. Again that's why it falls on me because I make the decisions to be able to build the program the way I want to build it. But this is the way that I feel the University of Minnesota has to be built. And those are decisions I get to make.

But I feel this is the way and what we need to be able to do by throwing some of these guys into the fire. But I think everybody's going to be really, really excited a few years from now and I think the conversations will be different. And I appreciate -- I want to make sure you all know I appreciate every single one of your opinions.

I read them. I look at them. I'm not one of those coaches that says I don't want to look at it. I appreciate everyone's opinion. The reason I appreciate everyone's opinion because you actually care. You care enough to want it to maybe one day be good. But again, as you look at frustration, when your experience doesn't match your expectation but your expectations have to be realistic based on what is there, and I can't do that or I'll lose a football team. If you say, well, you should be this and you're not, we need to be better than we were yesterday. And we need to change our best on a daily basis.

So, again, I appreciate everybody's opinion. And you are right. You're right. We gotta be better. And that's my job to get this team better and that's what we're going to do today at practice. Okay. Appreciate everybody's opinion. Sun came up today, we're rowing the boat. Go Gophers.