Q. After looking at film, how would you evaluate the offensive and defensive lines?
P.J. FLECK: Well, I think on the offensive side, I think we started a little bit slow but as we got into our rhythm, I thought we played a lot better.

Remember, offensive line is how well you play together, right; the congruency of everybody working in the same direction, same speed, same efficiency. Just being able to work together as a unit, and every year presents its own challenges across the country with every team, especially with ours, with the addition, especially, with Blaise moving inside and some other people that we're working with to provide depth, as well.

But I thought they really did a good job as the game went on, defensive line. I thought they did a nice job of being able to plug holes, stop the run first, and be able to get pressure on the quarterback, even with a four-man rush, and I think that was a big emphasis for us in the off-season. We've got to continue to do it, continue to get better.

There's a lot of room for improvement, I mean, a ton, on both sides of the ball. I'm not at all saying that it was an elite performance, but it was something that's positive to build on, and I'm really excited about how Coach Callahan and Coach West and Coach Rossi are really making those two positions better every day.

Q. What's the challenge of defending a Jeff Tedford offense?
P.J. FLECK: There's a lot of challenges. They use everybody. And this is a direct compliment to Coach Tedford, everywhere he's been, he's had elite quarterbacks. This is the same thing. Their quarterback at Fresno State is tremendous. Coach Tedford has been a part of Trent Dilfer and Aaron Rodgers and he's won everywhere he's been. And he makes -- he can flip it pretty quickly, based on the system he has and what he does.

And they are a tough football team. This is a very, very good football team that's coming in here. This is a team that is picked by some media outlets to be the "Group of Five" team that goes and plays in the New Year's Six Bowl.

Very, very good team. Reminds me of a team possibly of year three or year four at Western Michigan with what they have. They have a great quarterback -- I'm not comparing them. I think I made this public the other day. I'm not comparing talent-wise. We're not doing comparisons because I hate that.

But this gives you perspective: A Russell Wilson type in they know he can run, they will run him, but they are not going to run him first in every play. But when he does, he's incredibly dangerous, but he wants to throw first. They do a great job of moving the launch points of where he throws from.

So he's really never in the same place twice, and they make you catch him. That's very difficult to do because you're throwing to three really dynamic wide receivers and then defensively, they are just incredibly tough. The days of the Valley with Pat Hill and what they had going on there with the Carr brothers and what they were doing, it reminds me of that again, and they are very, very tough, they are very stingy.

They are very disciplined, in everything that they do, and that's a complete complement to Coach Tedford and what he's done in his career and what he continues to do, even now, especially at Fresno State. They had the greatest turnaround last year I think in college football history, like the second greatest ever, and that's because of him and his staff. He's hired some amazing coaches who we know, and they are a really good football team.
Very dangerous.

Q. Last year you were the least-penalized team in college football. Which ones do you feel like you need to get cleaned up and how much can you tolerate penalties to a certain degree?
P.J. FLECK: After our game I talked about the difference, I thought, of mental errors and then like football mistakes. We do everything we do, just like everybody else. We send in plays that we agree with or disagree with.

When you look at you're the least penalized team, that could be a really good thing or a really bad thing. I have coaches that have developed and said to me as a coach: You never want to be the least penalized team in the country; and that means you're not playing hard enough, which, there's merit to that. But don't want to be the most penalized team in the country because the discipline is not there.

But we have, you know, with the 30 kids on our two-deep that are freshmen, they are going to make some mistakes. They might grab when they are not supposed to, even though we are not supposed to, they might. Those are just things that we have to continue to work through, but again, for the most part, the mental part of that, I was happy with, but we definitely got to cut that down.

Q. You mentioned it a little bit, but how has Blaise Andries transitioned inside?
P.J. FLECK: Well, I think he's gotten so much better from even last year, from January, from the spring ball to the start of training camp, and that's what you want to see is just constant growth out of your football team.

We've had constant growth out of every single player.

I think that's very positive to see. I think every one of you can see that when you look at it through our perspective, but he's very intelligent. You know, he over-analyzes everything, which is a good thing. He's one of the smartest people we've had on our team.

He's going to be an actuary, right. Remember, I didn't even know what an actuary even way, and he wants to be that. So he's way smarter than his head football coach when you're talking about that, which is a really good thing because he's so intelligent.

But at times, he might overthink something and sit there and say, well -- and you're looking at him like, man, I never even thought of that.

You shouldn't be thinking of that; just do this.

But he's a really special player, and he's going to be a really great player as we continue to go forward for our Gopher football team.

But I think the mental part of it has slowed down a little bit for him and he's able to play a lot better. He's going to get bigger and stronger. He's only 1 years old. The kid is going to grow and get a lot better as he becomes a man, but I'm proud of the progress he's made.

Q. What did you see out of Zack when you look back at the New Mexico State game
P.J. FLECK: Decisiveness. You know, calmness. That poise. Like I said, after the game, that reassured what we talked about.

When you go back, I think one thing our football team, not just Zack, but in general, so many young guys who in high school, you went on Friday night, you wouldn't have meetings until Monday, maybe after school and if you want, everyone was really excited. Your girlfriend was wearing your jersey on Friday. Things were great. When you got there Monday, you won, they kind of corrected some things. All the coaches were happy and you moved on to the next opponent.

College football is a little bit different because you meet right after the game and you're critiquing everything. So everything we do is critiqued, and it's constructive criticism.
So a lot of our young guys have to learn how to, not take constructive criticism, but be able to know exactly when they walk into the building after a win, or a loss, that you’re going to be coached, right, about everything, every inch, every detail is going to be looked at, evaluated, which is different than high school at times.

Because high school film, you’re looking at it, even watching recruiting film: Did he catch it, did he not catch it? Who is that guy? You don’t even know the numbers half the time, so it’s hard to be able to learn. Now we have four different views, HD. You can see where their pinky is the entire play. That’s evolved. So looking at every inch, our whole team has to get better at that.

I was really proud of Zack, I was really proud of his poise and how he handled himself and how he was able to respond from the adversity that happened early. I thought he did a really nice job of that.

Now he’s got to continue to grow and get better in a ton of areas. You’re not able to really talk to him, but if you asked him, he would give you a whole line of what was actually, you know, good, and bad, but probably more of the bad part of what he had to get better at.

Q. Fresno had a couple blocked kicks for touchdowns. How much does that concern you, that part of their game?
P.J. FLECK: You know, that’s part of what they do. They have got two touchdowns in the kicking game. They have got -- last week, they got two touchdowns on defense with Pick-Sixes. They were able to score quickly and score often on offense.

Again, that makes them a very dangerous football team, all across the board, not just on special teams. As a coaching staff, you look at every avenue: Offense, defense, special teams, and you come up with the best plan you possibly can. They present a lot of challenges for us, but we’ll be ready for those.

Q. The fair catch rule on kickoffs, will bring more touchbacks, fewer violent collisions --
P.J. FLECK: It’s a great question.

Q. -- or do you think coaches and players will figure a clever way --
P.J. FLECK: I think as we evolve with rules, right, you find new things as you continue to go through your years with new rules.

First year of a new rule is always an interesting part, right. The first part of targeting, targeting was called every other second in terms of when targeting first came out in terms of the new rule changes until people adjusted to those.

I got a chance to watch college football on Saturday afternoon for a little bit as a fan on TV, which rarely happens and it was amazing all the announcers were saying like: We still haven’t seen this fair catch. Whatever game I was watching, they were like, we still haven’t seen this fair catch. Might have seen one of them in our telecast over the last, you know, 48 hours.

I think that was a little surprising to me because I think we’re going to take advantage of it. We’ve got a chance to take advantage of it some different times. I think we’re going to continue to do that.

But it all depends. When you’re going into -- if you’re going to do that, it’s not necessarily as a coach’s perspective of the protective rule. That’s a no-brainer. That’s why the rule is invented.

But now you have to evaluate the kicker, what type of kicks are you going to get; are you going to get more squibs or sky kicks; who is going to be catching those kicks; what are the weather conditions like; how hard is it.

Because remember, when you still fair catch that ball, if I drop the ball on the two-yard line, the ball is dead on the two-yard line.
I understand the rule. I respect the rule. But there's a little bit of that glitch to it, as well, because if we are protecting the players and they want to fair catch it, but they drop it, more coaches are going to be like, well, I don't want that risk of having on the two-yard line. Because if you drop the punt, okay, it's a live ball and the players are right there on top of you when you catch a punt, though. They are already surrounding you. There's not one kickoff team in the country that can surround a deep kick and get there, but within 20 yards of the young man, when he has a chance to make the catch.

So I think we've got to continue to evolve the rule. I like it. I think it's really good, but I think there's some things that coaches probably aren't as willing to do it yet because of the risk of dropping it, and I don't think that should -- that should -- for what the rule is intended to do, I like it.

But there's got to be some things that we clean up as coaches as we continue to move forward to help the game so we can call it more and feel better that we're doing that to be able to take the hits off because I think it's a great rule, I really do.

Q. The touchbacks seem to be a goal -- do you foresee a day when the kickoff will be no more?
P.J. FLECK: I don't know if it will be no more. I think it's still a big part of the game. I think it can change the game.

It's very similar to a punt return. You look, there were so many punt returns, kick returns this week, when you start looking at that, that's a major part of the game, the special teams. You look at Antoine Winfield, Jr.'s kick return for us, punt return, that's a big play in that game.

The kickoff part, I don't know if it will ever be out the game. I just think, again, if we can have the certain rules that make it worthwhile; maybe 25 is the right part; maybe 35 is the right part to do it.

Again, I like the new rule. I think it protects our players and that's the most important thing. I think as we continue to go to make coaches call it more, that risk that I just talked about, oohhh -- you'd better trust that person back there an awful lot that that ball is going to be caught; and kickoffs work a little bit different than punts the way they spin and the way they get caught up in the air.

But again I think for the most part I think it's a good rule and I think kickoffs will be around for a while as long as we continue to make it safer.

Q. With Blaise, did you see him maybe playing tackle at some point and how do you evaluate his running backing and pass blocking?
P.J. FLECK: Again, there's a lot to improve on. I think I would evaluate it for him as the best he possibly could do up until this point and that's all I can ask of our players: Give us everything you have up to this point and continue to show growth every single day.

Do I think he's a tackle? I think he can play all positions. Remember, we have basically four guys healthy when we first got here on that offensive line. We'd like 18 on scholarship. You'd like to be able to have three full groups.

We're not even close to having that yet. We were able to fill it with a little Band-Aid a little bit with taking seven offensive linemen, but we're still not close to the scholarship numbers at that position that we need to be successful to be able to move people around to create the depth.

You'd like to be able to see him move from guard to tackle but again, that depends on what Curtis and Daniel become in the future; what other linemen we bring in here; how good Jason Dickson is for us in the future, so on and so forth.

Right now we have guys plugged into where they are. We have a little bit of depth but not a lot, but we have more than we did last year, and I think where he's at is a good position for him right now, and that as he
evolves and gets better, you can see him possibly moving outside.

Q. What is Seth Green's role on this team, wide receiver, tight end, third string quarterback?
P.J. FLECK: Yes. All of them. I mean, he's -- I don't know much about tools but he's got to be a tool that does everything. Got to be some infomercial out there, tool that does everything. I'm not into fixing much; Heather doesn't want me fixing much probably around the house.

But he's kind of that Swiss Army knife where he's got a lot of different tools for us to be able to use. I think he's seen a little bit of that. Now one thing is when players see that in their first bit, they are like, all right, that's two touchdowns, I'm going to have three the next game or we're going to do X, Y and Z. We just have to continue to be creative, do the what defense gives us and be able to create opportunities for him to be able to show what he can do and help out football team.

Q. How has he handle that had? He came in as a quarterback and thought that's what his role is going to be, and then converted to tight end and then wide receiver and then shows up --
P.J. FLECK: Yeah, I think he's handled it very well. I think he's handled it as a mature man.

We sat down in my office and Seth and I talked and said:

"Seth, you have three options. One, you can be the third string quarterback and probably not play, unless, in an emergency situation, not get a lot of reps with the 1s, be on the scout team.

"Two, you can transfer. You can leave, you can go somewhere else and play; if quarterback is what you really want, I'll support you and we'll help you, and I completely understand.

"The third is, you can trust me, knowing that you have a lot of other skills than just the quarterback position, and you're too valuable to waste just as a third string quarterback. You can play on special teams. You can be an offensive player, a tight end, a wide out, a wildcat, a quarterback at different times, but give us a completely different element:

It didn't take him long. Of course, you know, he's very close to his family, too, but he's like, "Coach, yeah, I'm in, but I think I have to talk to my family first, though."

I'm like, "Yeah, I want you to go home and talk to your family." But I hung on the words he said. I said: Okay, you're in, okay, I'm going to think this is a good thing.

I'm really excited for him. Just shows we have to be, to generate the offense with as young a football team as we have, especially on that side, very critical positions, we have to find different ways to generate points, generate offense. We didn't have the ability to do that last year. We have the ability to do that this year, but again, with 30 freshmen on your two-deep and 28 playing last game, you start to see what type of football team this is and the creativity for us has to be there as coaches.

Q. Chris Autman-Bell had a catch where caught in traffic, took a pretty big hit and held on to it. Making plays like that, does that increase the confidence with the quarterback and coaches, that it doesn't have to be Tyler Johnson that you throw the ball to?
P.J. FLECK: Yeah, builds our confidence more than not making plays, and I really like our wide-out core.

Chris Autman-Bell, I call him "The Crab." His hands, when he catches the ball, we talk about pounds of pressure on alligators and sharks when they bite down. The way he catches the ball and hard he squeezes when he has it, it's impressive. I haven't seen many people catch the ball like he does naturally.

And not only him, but Demetrius Douglas starting to become a wide out that we need him to be there.

Rashod Bateman, you got a chance to see what he can do, and you got a glimpse of it because I would have loved to see him break that tackle and that guy not be there; so you can actually see what type of speed that
young man has.

And then Ty. You know, Ty has been a consistent player for us. I would love to see him catch the third down to start it earlier for us. Because I think if he catches that third down pass, we get into our rhythm a lot faster.

We are going to have to rely on a lot of young guys to get us into rhythm and start fast. But that's okay. Those guys, again, they are just like Zack. They are 400-level thinkers. They are 400-level players already, which is the way want. If you're going to play freshmen, you might as well play freshmen that are really ready.

And they are ready. But they are just going to have to learn to how to be able to play, how to be able to come off of failing; how to be able to play against these top corners in the country and the secondaries.

But they are a very confident group, and I love what Coach Simon and Coach Ciarrocca are doing to make their strengths highlighted on game day and part of the game plan. That's part of what we have to do. We want to get them all touches; how do we do that.

Q. When did you start doing that, and is it always effort plays, or are there other categories based on the game?

P.J. FLECK: What I like to do as a head coach, I like to show effort plays. So I call myself the "how" coach at that moment, right. I'm the how and the culture coach at that time.

And so whether it's win or loss, there's always positive you can pull from games. So in our team meeting, no matter what, before we get to our constructive criticism, I always like to be able to show what we did really well in our culture, our how, our heart, our passion, the way the game is supposed to be played.

And so I always pick three clips: One offense, one defense, one special teams and start my meeting with that. Because no matter if you win or lose, there's amazing examples that come off of that film that we can learn from that to continue to grow and with as young and inexperienced team as we have, they need to see that.

They need to hear that. They need that positive reinforcement just as much as they need that constructive criticism, and I think that's true for any Millennial generation young person. They need that positive reinforcement, and again they need to listen. That's value and very important information coming from the head coach at that particular moment.

So I always usually start our team meetings -- I've done that last year even the same way.

Q. How do you see Zack's confidence grow throughout the game and then afterwards now that he's got his first collegiate win under his belt?

P.J. FLECK: I saw a lot of confidence, but a lot of disappointment in a good way, where he felt like he could have been way better at that particular play. Some young quarterbacks that I've watched, they will throw a pass, good or bad and just be like, Phew, I'm glad that one's over, when is the next play. You know, Phew, gosh, thank gosh that one's over.

He wasn't that way. You could tell when he missed the throw, it was like complete disappointment. Like he knew he could make the throw, and he already heard me in his ear and Coach Ciarrocca in his ear, and he changed it already.

And literally, after he dropped the fumble, which he's got to make that play and he knows that, comes over, puts his hand on the shoulder, says, "Coach, we're going to be alright."

That's the type of confidence he has and that's very hard to find as a true freshman. Not only just a redshirt freshman, but a true freshman; that just got here in January, to have that type of confidence that you're running the system and owning the team that much and taking accountability for your actions.

Some guys will put the blame on somebody else, he takes it all upon himself and that's very difficult to do when
you don't have a lot of performance to backup your leadership.

**Q. The deep throws in the second half, didn't quite hit --**

P.J. FLECK: Well, I think there's a few things. One, I think, in a few throws he did the right thing. He gave our players a chance to make a play on it. That's all we can ask.

The ones that are overthrown, those are the ones you have to look at because our players don't even have a chance to make a play on that.

So those are the ways we evaluate deep balls: Did we have at least a chance to make a play on it; if we had a chance to make a play on it, did the wide-out make the play, did not make the play, why not. If he had a chance to make a play on it, but it was out of bounds, that's an issue; or if it's overthrown, we didn't even have a shot at it.

So we evaluate those throws that way.

**Q. A couple plays might have gone for big plays but Carter hustled and chased the guy down. Does that send a message to even the younger guys, the whole defense; this is the standard of how you play?**

P.J. FLECK: Yeah, one of the plays Carter makes was part of, Andy, what you were talking about, the how clip: He comes off the back side, chases the guy down. The guy actually throws the ball to I think the opposite side. He runs back to the other side and makes the play for a shoestring tackle.

And that's -- you know, he used our tackling circuit. He swept the ankle and made the play.

But that's Carter Coughlin. He's an undersized defensive end, however people want to call it. I think he's got an oversized heart, and that's what it's all about.

We're going to have to find and continue to develop players like that. I'm proud of him for that because he is an example of our culture and how hard you should play, and that play showed an example to everybody what the standard is and what the standard is becoming.

We are having more and more of those plays now than we did last year. It's harder to pick through three.

Last year it was like: All right, I've got to find three; what is the closest I possibly can get to three. And that's not a disrespect, it was just harder to find.

Now, knowing the culture, mastering the culture, I think they understand how hard the expectation is to play and how hard we practice. If you were at our practice today, which a lot of you probably weren't, none of you probably were, but it was one of the best practices we ever had.

I mean, it was one of the most efficient, fast practices we ever had; the most energetic practices we ever had and I even told the team. I said -- I told them, I said, that's one of best practices I've ever seen at any level and that's a compliment. They are learning how to do it.

Now, does that promise you anything? No. But it gives you a better chance, and that's what we got to continue to add up those chances.

**Q. Would you talk about how much it helped Zack to have a center like Jared with his line calls and other things that he does, his experience, leadership --**

P.J. FLECK: It's a great question. Question is about Jared Weyler. I thought he was one of our elite performers of the week. He's never going to be in a stat book. You talk about crush blocks or elite blocks or knockdowns or pancakes. He calls an elite game.

It's like a holder; you never he's there until he makes a mistake. That's kind of like Jared. I don't think a lot of us
appreciate how good Jared Weyler is at calling a game and getting us in the right call of what we need to be up front; the changing of the ID; the voice inflection; to be able to get the message to all five; his body language; his volume reflecting confidence; and getting to that everybody in a very split second when something changes or the Mike changes or the ID changes or the front changes, that's pretty impressive.

He called an elite game and did a nice job. A lot of room for improvement in the physical part but I thought he did a nice job mentally.

Q. What's the biggest hurdle Zack has to face in his second start?
P.J. FLECK: I think one of the biggest things just in general, the biggest critic has to be yourself. Nobody is going to put no pressure on myself than me. Nobody is going to put more pressure on Zack Annexstad than Zack to get better every day.

I think the biggest hurdle is ourselves. It's ourselves mentally, physically and emotionally.

Can he prepare better than did he week one? Is he going to be able to prepare physically better than he did week one? Emotionally? And obviously athletically in terms of treatment. Is he going to be able to do all of that and is he going to be able to bring everybody with him?

Every week, that will be the same challenge. I know what type of kid he is, but again, he's going to have to learn and the only person that's going to know that is him.

We'll have a really good idea, but at the end of the day, our players are being accountable when they look in the mirror; are you doing those things every single day to be the best you can be, not only just would you be football team, but academically, socially and spiritually, as well.

Q. Rodney Smith have a chance for a special year?
P.J. FLECK: I think Rodney is really special.

Rodney, this is going to sound maybe a little different coming out of my mouth, but I think he's one of our most-improved players. Everybody thinks Rodney Smith is a great player and he's been that and he has been but I think he's one of our most improved leaders. I think he's one of our most improved pass protectors. I think he's improved in his vision and his run game and study habits, mastering the game, mastering the system, bringing the young guys with them. He can easily shut down. He's got three months left of his Gopher career somehow, some way. He can shut down and move on and just get through and worry about him and let all the freshmen fend for themselves that he's got a lead; he does not do that.

I thought he had a really special game. It's hidden, you know, just because -- and if he scored, but also we wanted to protect him, too.

I think he's got a chance to have a special -- I always talk about one-day, a one-day life. He's got a chance to be special more today than he was yesterday.

And if you can add all those up, yeah, to answer your question, yeah, he's got a chance to do that. But to put expectations on him and say you have to do this, or I expect you to do that, I think that's unfair to do that young people at times. They just have to get better today than they were yesterday. He's piled those across on the last 12 months, and I'm really happy that he had a really good game because he deserved it.

Q. You were a Group of Five coach. What mindset do you think that team will have coming in on Saturday?
P.J. FLECK: I guarantee Jeff Tedford doesn't care he's in a Group of five. That's out the window. Because as a Group of Five coach, I didn't care. I didn't care: Group of Five, Power Five, MAC, Big Ten, it did not matter.
I think that's what makes him really special. You can tell, and I think if you limit your team to what people say they are, I don't think that's a very good coach. And I know he's not doing that. He's a dangerous football coach in a very, very positive way.

He's one of those coaches that you enjoy competing with because you know how good he is. He's got a really, really elite football team. At Western Michigan when we were going through it, we always talked about when you control yourself, you control your opponent, and we didn't worry about whoever we were facing. I think that's what made us really good. That team was mature enough to understand that and do it.

His team is mature enough, and I think understands that enough, that they are going to control themselves. They are not talking about the Gophers except X & Os. They are talking about how they have to continue to get better, which we are talking to our football team the same way. But they are a dangerous football team, a really, really dynamic football team and we've got a tremendous challenge and an opportunity coming up here on Saturday evening.