P.J. Fleck

P.J. FLECK: Happy to be 3-0 and now we get into conference play, which everybody is looking forward to, so we’re excited about that as well. But we’re now 0-0. Everybody knows that, our team knows that. We had a really good bye week with practice, meetings, walkthroughs, plus a little time to rest and heal. So with that we’ll open it up for questions.

Q. In the Georgia Southern game the wildcat, not so effective, didn’t use it that many times. You had run it so effectively all last season and it was at a point even last season where everybody in the stadium seemingly knew what was going to happen, but yet it worked. What was the difference?

P.J. FLECK: It was new, it was something new, right? Plus when Rodney and Shannon went out last year, before we knew about Mohamed Ibrahim, in terms of proving himself throughout the course of the year, and Bryce Williams throughout the course of the year you’re looking at, okay, we got two freshmen, how are we going to run the ball. So that’s where the wildcat with Seth Green was invented.

We’re going to use it, we’re going to still use it, we’re going to mix up how we use it as we continue to get into Big-10 play, but do we need it as much is more the question, based on the running back situation we have. I think that’s more the question to be able to ask. But Seth’s a tremendous talent and we’re going to use him as best we possibly can, as the quarterback, as the wildcat and then obviously as a wide receiver, but he’s developing into a really good receiver too.

Q. You liked the offensive line a lot coming out of the spring. What’s your evaluation now through the first three games?

P.J. FLECK: Well I really like our offensive line. But again, there’s not a senior on that offensive line right now. Just because I like them doesn’t mean that they’re the best offensive line in America. They need to continue to get better, we need to continue to get better, it’s a growth in progress every single week, every single day, there’s some things we got to continue to iron out and get better at.

But again it’s still really, really a young group up front and that needs to get better, needs to play better together, and whether we have got to rotate some guys in there or whether we got to keep the group the same, we’re going to look at every option to be able to make it the best five we possibly can in that particular play, in that particular drive and in that particular situation.

Q. Talk about the differences in styles with the freshmen and Sindelar?

P.J. FLECK: I don’t think so, I really don’t. I don’t see it on the film, based on last week and then when Sindelar’s been in. Whether it’s Jack or whether it’s Sindelar, they’re both really good quarterbacks. Sindelar’s obviously got more experience and played a lot more games, probably a little bit more comfort with the system. But they spread you out from sideline to sideline, goal line to goal line, you have to cover everybody. Rondale Moore gets a lot of the credit, he’s going to get his touches no matter what. Somehow, some way he’s going to get his touches, you cannot just take him out of the game, he’s going to touch the football. You got to rally around him, you got to tackle really well, he’s
strong, he's a 650 pound squatter, maybe even more by now, and he's really talented.

But in terms of the quarterback, their system’s designed, in my opinion, watching it, no matter who is in there, to be able to have success and they do a great job of creating explosive plays, I think they're top-40 in the country in explosive plays. Whether it's flea flickers that would be trick plays to some people they're run four times a games, whether it's reverses or screens or gadgets they're going to find ways to move the football, that offense is designed that way. They're averaging a lot of yards for a reason and it's not just number 4, they have a great supporting cast, they have really good talent in terms of their depth at the wide receiver position and then they're taking number 33 and moving him back in the back field as well so they can be able to get more in the run game as well, as well as their other running back.

So part of what makes that offense really good, it's very creative and I'm sure with a bye week they're going to be really creative.

Q. With your depth at running back, does Shannon bring something unique?
P.J. FLECK: I think all our backs bring something unique. I think Shannon brings something else. He's healthy, he hasn't played yet. I think there's that spunk, that look in his eye that he cannot wait to get back on the field. And you combine him with our other backs I think that's where we want to be. One week later where we want to be. One week ago we were sitting there warming up Trey Potts and everybody's talking about our depth at running back and Trey Potts took every rep on the scout team and now we're warming him up and we're sitting there going, what's going on. That's why you need, as Glen Mason would say, that pair and the spare. You need to be able to have the pair and the spare and the extra in the trunk of another pair and a spare just in case in the Big-10 as you continue to go through league play.

Q. Is that your favorite Mason saying that you referred to?
P.J. FLECK: That's the one I know.

Q. How valuable has Chris Williamson's versatility been through these first three games?
P.J. FLECK: One thing I'll say about Chris Williamson, he's grown up a lot. His work ethic has gone through the roof, his commitment to his teammates, commitment to himself, commitments to football has gone through the roof. I think when people transfer in sometimes and they get in here they're like, okay, well, I'm going to this place and I'm going to be able to play right away. And then you get in there and realize it's a lot harder than you thought. He's grown up a lot, but being able to play nickel, play corner, I think he's become more physical, he's become way more confident, he's invested in his body like I've never seen him do it before within the last year. And when he truly decided to commit to it he's become a really good football player. Not only that he's got one of the best personalities on our football team. He is absolutely hilarious. You get around Chris he makes you smile. He's a guy that is infectious, his personality, his leadership, he's really done a great job with that secondary in my opinion and I think we're a better football team with him on the field.

Q. How is being tested in each of your first three games helped you in terms of going on the road hostile environment for your first Big-10 game?
P.J. FLECK: Like we said at the beginning of the year, when we were talking about the non-conference schedule, they're 32-8 and people can criticize that all they want. There were eight Mountain West teams that beat Power 5 schools this year. We weren't one of them. So when you look at the group of five and you look at whatever it is, these were champions that we were playing
against, of their respective conferences, and we had to find a way to win.

We made a lot of mistakes but that credits our opponent as well. But we found a way to win. And it's not the result. Just like when I was here in here year one and year two, the result's the result. The result's at the end of the game after 60 minutes, you look up and see what the score is. But it's how you got there. We have to be better at the things that we need to get better at that got us to that result. The process-driven things, the details, the fundamentals. There's things that happened in our game that maybe I haven't seen in a whole year of football, let alone happen in the last six minutes of a game. But they were able to overcome that. Not only overcome that, on the offensive side third it's Demetrius Douglas who makes the two big plays. At Fresno State it's Chris Autman-Bell. At South Dakota State it's Rashod Bateman. At Georgia Southern it was Tyler Johnson in the last second.

So what I like about it is everybody's getting the pressure and the expectation to put the ball in their hand and they're performing at a high level.

These are the lessons that -- this is why we coach, in my opinion. These are the lessons that whether you win or lose, whether people get hired or fired, these are the lessons they're going to learn and they're going to take with them as husbands, as fathers, as brothers as sons, this is what's going to make them the man that they are.

They're going to be able to believe when somebody's not believing in them. They're going to be able to way find a way to run their company or get their company out of something that maybe is really tough. Maybe get their family and lead their family out of a very difficult situation.

When we got done with that drive and we got back in the locker room, usually I sit, after I get done with all of, I sit in my locker room and I just sit there and I don't leave -- I leave the stadium pretty late. And I usually talk to Gerrit Chernoff and Heather, those are the two that actually will listen to me at that point. And I told Gerrit, I said, I want that third and 30 in my office some how, some way. And the next day Gerrit has this third and 30 printed out, framed, already on my desk and it's sitting right behind my desk. It's a powerful picture. Because at that moment there were a lot of people who thought we were going to lose that game. And people always say, what's the hardest thing about the University of Minnesota's job and I said changing people's thoughts, perceptions, ideas. And that's what I mean, that it isn't over, it's not time to leave yet and I appreciate our fans sticking around and staying. And I hope people see that. This team's going something to them. What that is we'll find out over the course of the next 10 weeks, but they have something to them and it's special.

Whatever the result is, whatever the number is, they have something special that's teaching them lessons for the rest of their life. And again that's why at least I coach and that's why I'm in this profession because they're learning those lessons and that's what we focus on when we're teaching that lifetime lesson during the bye week.

Q. What option is Douglas on that third and 30?
P.J. FLECK: He was No. 2 option.

Q. What does it say about when some people look at him as your fourth wide receiver in that situation?
P.J. FLECK: Well for us to have success we feel that all of our receivers have to have the ability to make plays. So maybe in the years past we were saying, okay, we're going to do everything we can
whether it's formation, whether it's motion, whether it's formation somebody hasn't seen, just to free up that one person. If that one person's not open we got a problem.

I don't think we have that any more. I think we have the ability for our guys to make plays. Now all three of those guys behind Tyler are sophomores, they're young, they're still developing. Quarterback's a sophomore, offensive line there's no seniors, but they have the talent inside of them to find way to make a play.

Because last year a lot of them, you look even at the Purdue game, we didn't make many plays last year. I watched it 20 times and we dropped six passes. And now they have come this far to be able to make those catches. That just shows how much they have grown.

Are we where we want to be yet? Absolutely not. We got a long way to go. I mean a long way to go. But it just shows that we can run our system and I think from the first three games what we saw, based on our team, run our system, let our players play, continue to evolve and add to it and put them in the best position to be successful.

But we can run and not worry about, hey, this guy's got to get this catch on this play. And I think they have all earned that.

Q. What's been the precedent when you guys self scout? What's the process when do you it? Does Ciarrocca tell Rossi what's going on and vice versa?
P.J. FLECK: As a coach you got to be comfortable being uncomfortable. I'm sure Coach Mason said that at some point. Every coach has said that.

But that's what we want even our coaches to be. It is my job find a way to get everybody in the organization to fail every day. We defined failing as growth. Failure as quit. Big difference.

It is my job to make sure they fail, they grow, everybody comes back tomorrow, wanting to be here. So there's a balance to that. And how you do that is very careful.

During the bye week it's always uncomfortable, everybody wants to get on to the next week. I don't want to go on to the next week yet. Let's give our players some time off to get away and us coaches, let's get together and let's scout each other, let's game plan each other.

And I remember I told our staff and they're sitting there going, you want to us game plan? Shouldn't we be doing something else. I'm like, listen, we're going to game plan each other, we're going to take a whole day and just like we would game plan an opponent on first and second down and third down we're going to game plan each other.

It will take a lot less because we know each other's personnel, but we can evaluate that and even -- so we wrote up everything we have on every player we have, just as if we were going to play them. All the schematics, all the formations, all the tendencies. It's an uncomfortable meeting. And Joe's talking to Kirk, Kirk's talking to Joe, Coach Wenger is talking to himself. But it's one that we all had to hear.

And for me that's, it's also really healthy for me to hear what other people's perspectives are. And if you never take time to look at yourself, you're always comparing yourself to someone else.
Listen, my responsibility is this football team, not somebody else's. So I've got to make sure that our staff, our coaches, our players they're all on the same page and that was one of the things we did.

And I thought it was a wonderful exercise, we have done it before, but I think this particular team I thought it was really good for.

Q. (No microphone.)
P.J. FLECK: I think it was a combination. Because I think that as Rossi got to it he wanted to be very balanced and he goes through what he thinks strength and weaknesses are and whether you agree or disagree with those, those are real, those are what show up on film. And then Rossi knows our team a lot better than anybody else, so I think his, he was pretty spot on with his evaluation of the offensive. And then Kirk was spot on on the defense. And Coach Wenger is always spot on with the special teams and evaluating himself because he does that every single day. I mean he's a grinder.

Q. Did you come up with that self scouting or is that something you learned from Tressel or somewhere else along the way?
P.J. FLECK: I'm sure I learned it at some point. But I did it at Western Michigan at some point, and this is the first time we have really done it here. I think it's necessary at certain points and I thought this year it was really necessary for this.

There's only so much time in the day, right, and we have a certain way of doing things and sometimes you can't wait to get to that routine, but sometimes when you get to take a breath and you have some time you got to use your time wisely and that's what I felt we needed to be able to look at, was look at ourselves, as well as our opponent as we continue to go through the days.

And then obviously recruiting and then our players and everything else that it goes into.

Q. Things didn't go your way the first conference play road games last season. How have you seen maybe the mental toughness maybe get more and more like buildup like going into this game perhaps to see a different perspective?
P.J. FLECK: That's a good question. The one thing I'll say -- it's like when people say, you make your most improvement from game one to game two. I think you make your most improvement every week. You have to. Especially in the Big-10. And if you're not you're going to get passed and you're going to get beat.

So the first game, when you look at it, it's like, okay, we haven't won the first two games of conference play the last two years. I don't look at that like everybody else looks at that. I think that's more for just kind of talk throughout the week. We're either going to win or we're going to lose, it's one or the other. Obviously we want to be on one side of that more than the other.

But it's the preparation, we can't look at it that way, it's like getting just fired up for one game less or more than another game, they're all equally important. And the most important game is the next game. No matter if that's the fourth game of the season or whether that's the first game of conference play, they're all equally important. And there's a lot of teams in this league that have started 1-3 and won the league. A lot of teams have been undefeated and won the league. A lot of teams started undefeated and didn't win the league.
So we have just got to be better today than we were yesterday and that's what we're going to continue to focus on.

Q. Do you have any update on Zach and his recovery and what the timetable is?
P.J. FLECK: Yeah, he got a -- last week he got a new scooter, four wheels instead of three. So he upgraded. They said he liked that a little bit better. Kept getting a flat tire with his other one.

And then finally got off the scooter the other day. He's in a walking boot and was throwing after practice today and that's Zach. So that's where he's at. He's doing really good though. He was throwing on his scooter too. The guy just can't wait to just throw the football.

Q. At times you tried to raise expectations for what this program can attain, at times you tried to manage expectations for certain teams. What should the expectations for this team be?
P.J. FLECK: It sounds like coach-speak, for people that know me, I'm going to say the same thing, we're going to be better today than we were yesterday. That was the same thing when we were 0-4 in the league last year and then we won some games, we wants to be better today than we were yesterday.

And when you coach young people that are 17 to 22, if you're not just focusing on just that moment, you don't have them, like they're somewhere else.

So everything in our program is designed to focus on the now. The now will create the then. And if you're looking at the then before you look at the now you got a problem.

I think our team knows that we can be pretty good, whatever that pretty good means, because they have seen how they have gotten to where they have, but they have also seen how they have gotten to where they have, on the positive side and the negative side.

And when they're very humble and they're very willing to listen and they're coachable and they want to get better -- our players have organized their own meetings, away from the coaches, and not to separate things but just to say, hey, listen, this is what we have to do as players. If coach always talks about a player-led team, we have to be able to do this. They're not the ones going to be playing, they're not the ones going to be making the plays, these are the things we have to fix. And then we have to move forward. Because it's not a lot of things but there's these small fundamental details that we have to get better at that, that they have to be able to see, be very honest with themselves, very real with themselves and then go fix.

So in terms of the expectations, again that's what I've always said our expectation is, we want to be better today than we were yesterday. And if we do that, it should be a pretty good football team.

Q. When you play three games where you have to come back in that fourth quarter, does it make it, is it more of a coachable experience, is it easier to get those guys to listen to you as opposed to if those first three are just easy walks in the park?
P.J. FLECK: I hope it's always easy to listen to you as a coach. I hope your team always responds to you. I think every coach wants that. I don't think it's -- you never want a team that will just listen to you when they needed a wake-up call, not letting the circumstance dictate your behavior is a very big part of our culture. It's a very big part of how we play, how we are academics. We have 85 kids over a 3.0 right now. Eighty-five football players.
And that's an expectation. When you talk about expectations they're better today than they were yesterday.

So in terms of how our team responds, I never want them to be responding based on just a circumstance, this one's bigger than this one. I never want that.

But when you win fourth quarter games as close as we have, it's up to that coach to capture that and then teach the moments off of that. But everything we have taught is the result's the result. We're 3-0. We could easily be 0-3 right now. Easily. Right? I think everybody in the room would agree. But we found a way to be 3-0. Well how did we get to that and what are the things that made us that. That's what we want to focus on.

But if we start focusing on just the result and, hey, we did this and we need to move on. I'm not one to say, hey, let's just move on from that. We need to squeeze all the juice from that orange that we possibly can and dissect that game from top to bottom and left to right to make sure that we get everything out of it. So I think that's what we kind of look at and keep moving forward.

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