

**UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA FOOTBALL MEDIA CONFERENCE
HEAD FOOTBALL COACH P.J. FLECK**

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PJ FLECK: Good afternoon, everybody, thanks for being here. First of all, just want to thank our fans, creating that electric environment, one of the best college football environments I've ever been a part of, if not the best. I want to thank everybody for supporting our program, supporting our players. It meant a lot to us and you could just feel the difference in TCF Bank Stadium. I want to thank our band for all the things that they continue to do, our student section, the State of Minnesota and that game brought everybody together and that was the whole vision from the start. We got a long way to go. We're very proud to be 1-0 in the Penn State season, got to give them a lot of credit, that's a tremendous football team, a very well-coached football team with a lot of athletes, but we were fortunate to come out with a 1-0 record from the Penn State season and Sunday we reset that to 0-0 for the Iowa Hawkeye season and had a tremendous day of practice today. So with that we'll open it up for questions.

Q. What happens to a head coach after a game like that in terms of your cell phone, correspondence where does it start out?

PJ FLECK: Well the cell phone -- Heather and I have a rule, we never look at a cell phone the day of a game, you just can't do that. We had over 500, 600 text messages on mine and probably three or four on hers. And we get back to every single one, no matter what. And it's, and then you count e-mails as well.

But we never look at our phone. But Heather and I, we hung out in our office in the stadium until everybody left, kind of hung out with some friends, some former players from Western Michigan were there, hung out with them and then we just went back to our house and watched more football.

That's what you do. That's what we do. We're a football family. That's what we do. And just had a really nice night. Those are the times you get to enjoy it. Because come Sunday morning -- I do not sleep well on Saturday nights, no matter what it is. And Heather's always telling me, Hey, just relax, you got plenty of time, go to sleep. Once I'm up, I'm up. My eyes open, I know most people open their eyes, look around, go get a glass of milk, go back to bed. If I'm up, I'm up. So that's kind of what we did.

But a lot of text messages, a lot of people we heard from, some that are just tremendous friends, some people we haven't heard from in years, but it was wonderful to be able to get those text messages and then just be able to enjoy the night, because you had the whole day to actually do that, it wasn't you got home at 2 o'clock in the morning, we got to watch some really good football and hang out on the couch and just be with friends and family, which is very unique in college football.

Q. You coached at different levels, NFL, you have a pretty good gauge of talent. Do you view this current team as a, to use your word, elite talented team or is this a team that is just making the best of what it has?

PJ FLECK: I think it's an elite team. There was a thing I thought I saw the other day, my GM, Gerrit Chernoff, sent to me, in terms of recruiting, took the Top-10 teams in the country and talked about the five-star four-star athletes on every one of those teams. I think we had five. And we're a Top-10 team. And that means everybody else is three stars, two stars, no stars, whatever it is. But it's an elite team because they put their individual accomplishments, individual needs aside for everybody else. They do it at an elite level. They don't just do it in a very coach-speak way. Or they don't do it and just, yeah, yeah, we'll say we're going to do that, but I really care about just me.

They really love each other, they really sacrifice for each other and when you got everybody rowing the boat in the same direction, same speed, same efficiency, all believing in one vision, it's a powerful force no matter what that is, not even just football, in any sport. I think that's what this team does. They constantly change their best every single day, they constantly compete with their self, not necessarily against someone else but with their self to be a better individual today than they were yesterday, academically, athletically, socially and spiritually.

And I think that's powerful. When you start making it bigger than yourself and doing things for other people. The greatest thing when you talk to our players is that they were on the same page as I was, how cool of an environment was that, how cool was that for the State of Minnesota, how cool was that for our alum. It wasn't about them. They know that they're putting things in place that are going to be remembered for a long time, but there's still going through it and we have a long way to go until the end of it where they can actually enjoy it.

Q. You're turnover margin's changed dramatically from last year to this year, both offensively and defensively. What do you attribute that to?

PJ FLECK: We've evolved as a program. But you can say it until your face is blue, it doesn't matter until the players buy in. I got a text from a friend of those 600 text messages and he showed the turnover margin where we were ranked at Western Michigan when we first got there, we were like 100 something and then in the 13-0 season, 13-1 season, we were No. 1 in the country in turnover margin. It was the maturity of the football team to realize how important that is. It isn't just you say it and they believe it. They have got to fail, they have got to fail, they have got to fail, and then they fail enough times where they finally grow up. It's like touching the hot stove.

And then here at Minnesota I think our first year we were like 100 and last year 89th and now we're 13th. There's nothing by coincidence. You take care of the football, you have explosive plays, you limit explosive plays, you tackle well and you break tackles, you're going to win a lot of football games. That's what that 78 percent is for.

So we have done all we can up to this point, now we got to even be better at teaching our players how to win games. How are games won, not how are games loss less. That's what we want them to be able to understand.

And when they're coaching their kids one day, and I always joke around with them, and we got three guys back there, with little Winston running around or little Antoine Winfield, Juniors running around or little Tanner Morgans, we want them to be able to teach their kids when they're coaching their teams of how to go win the game. And it's very educational and our program's educational, it's not just about the X's and O's it's education within the X's and O's. Situational football. Getting them to understand football the game through coach's eyes, through winning eyes and obviously better player eyes.

Q. What are the contributing factors, what are some of the contributing factors so you've seen with this team's red zone success?

PJ FLECK: Just taking care of the football, consistency and then being very smart. I think Kirk Ciarrocca is doing great job once we get down in the green zone and, again, up to this point, right, because you're only as good as where you are right now and we have got to continue to change our best, be better at it. We have explosive playmakers on the outside, I think we mixed up our play action game down there, and again we have emphasized that. In the off-season we do studies all the time about the green zone efficiencies. So third down, green zone, and then the ball usually is what we study in the off-season.

And we show on the screen in team meetings for our players, these are the top NFL teams in the green zone, these are the bottom teams in the green zone. And usually you can make a comparison.

Same thing on third down, same thing with the ball. So again showing them how important, when they get down there, it's a complete different mentality. We have to find a way to put points on the board. We were 2-2 when we got down there and they were, I think, 4-6, and I think that's a big difference in the game.

Q. Going back to when you first started working with Kirk what made you guys a good fit?

PJ FLECK: Well we're very different, right? Because I think that people think, well you have to be like me to either work for me or play for me. That's not -- the personality is not what we're talking about. Internally the drive to be the best, I think that's got to match -- whoever's going to a place or going to, whether a coach or player or going to somewhere, that's got to match. You got to match the head coach's vision, period.

But your personality doesn't have to match. Kirk and I couldn't be more opposites, I'm talking north pole, south pole and we're standing right in the middle of it. And the only way we can kind of connect by looking straight down through the core of the earth.

But we compliment each other really well. He taught me so much when I worked for him. Not only just the football but how to work for someone. Not only to work

for him, but how to then work for your head football coach. He taught me a long time ago, make sure that the head football coach doesn't have anything on his desk that has to do with you or your players. You want to make sure you have a really good time here at Rutgers, make sure Greg Schiano has nothing on his desk with the wide outs.

And I took that to heart. I've learned so much from him. And then when you look at how we compliment each other, he allows me to be a head football coach, he allows me to be able to coach situational football. He'll tell you, he's goes, I just call plays. I let him know with situational stuff, Kirk you got four downs here. Perfect. I'll call it differently.

But it allows us to be steps ahead because he's not doing all of that, I'll take care of the situational stuff, you call the calling the plays and then we work together that way.

And if there's something that we disagree on, we work it out, because there's so much respect amongst ourselves. But he allows me to be the best head coach I can be, he's the reason I feel like I can be the best head coach I can be, and then hopefully in return he feels that way that he can be the best coordinator he can be, because he doesn't worry about that all that other stuff. But he's tremendous and he puts our players in the best position to be successful on offense.

Q. What are the similarities in defenses, between Penn State, you had a lot of success against them, Iowa is another great defense. What the similarities and differences?

PJ FLECK: First of all their defense is tremendous, a lot of respect for what they do. Iowa plays Iowa football and that's that cultural sustainability over a long period of time. And I think if I sit there and say, Iowa plays Iowa football, you probably all know what I'm talking about. They're going to run the ball efficiently, they take care of the football, they don't beat themselves. Defensively, they're going to tackle, they're going to keep everything in front, limit explosive plays and you know what they're going to do. They have ran a lot of the same coverages for the last decade, but they do it so well and whoever they put in the game is expected to perform at the same level as the first guy that was in there. And they're very consistent, they don't beat themselves, they're not penalized very often, and they just play really good football.

And that's a credit to their staff, credit to their culture and their tradition of what they have been able to establish there.

But they are a very, very sound defense. They are always where they're supposed to be when they're supposed to be there, and they make you put long drives together.

Q. You talk about resetting every Sunday, going back to 0-0. Was that at all more difficult a couple days ago after such an emotional high, compared to maybe other wins this season?

PJ FLECK: No, I don't think so. Because we celebrate -- it didn't matter if we beat Rutgers, didn't matter if we beat South Dakota State, it didn't matter if we beat Penn State, the celebration in the locker room was the celebration in the locker room. That's why you do those things.

When we win, it doesn't matter who we win -- you would think we won the Super Bowl every time we win in our locker room after a game. Because I never want one to feel different than the other because that means you're valuing somebody else rather than devaluing something else.

We're going to value all of them. We're going to create them all as a championship game. And that's why I never want anybody in the locker room hanging a head after a win. You know how hard winning is? Winning is very hard. So there are no bad wins, at least in my opinion. In terms of how people talk about or the media talks about it, I get all that, but for us there's, I don't want them to ever think there's a bad win. The result's the result. How we played is what I'm interested in.

But we'll get to that on Sunday. We have been so consistent in how we have handled all of that. We celebrate on Saturday. Sunday morning we stand up -- they will tell you, we literally stand up, do the same routine, and we literally do. We stand up, we high five each other, we pat each other on the back, we turn to our right, thumbs up, we turn to our left, thumbs up. We do all these different things and then we put our leather vests on and we make sure we go back to work. And we literally simulate that. What does the leather vest mean? It means, hey, now you got to be, you got to be ready for some criticism. You got to be ready for going in the film room to be critiqued.

And our players have handled that very maturely, professionally, and that's why I think we have made, we have gotten better every week because they handle that the right way and there's not just this one win that's bigger than the other. It's, this is the biggest game of the year coming up against Iowa, period. It's the biggest game we played in. We are 0-0 and this is a one-game championship against Iowa.

And they have adopted that and they have believed that. It's one thing to say it, I always said that, there's, I said that during 1-11, I said that during 5-7. But they have really adopted it and it's become them and I think that's one of the major differences.

Q. Do you, when you have this success this year, do you, when you scout a team going in you say, Iowa does this, you know who Iowa is. Do you factor in at all that now maybe teams are going to try something different because things haven't worked against Minnesota or do you have to account for that or do you look back at a lot of tape?

PJ FLECK: Well you do everything you can to look at bodies of work over the course of the last however many years. You can only go back certain levels. And like I said, coaches could work 24/7. There's enough film out there, there's enough technology out there, you could never leave your office and you could never shut the TV off for 24 hours straight, 356 days a year.

There comes a point where you got to be able to just play your defense, play your offense, play special teams and then react. But you do everything you can to see tendencies on film, and then understand, okay, off these tendencies, here's some things -- at least I'll go to the defense and say, hey, off these tendencies, here's some other things that, if I was them, I would be doing. And then you give them four or five different things off of what you see tendency-wise of, hey, be ready for this. Look, they haven't done this yet but this could be coming on the back side. Whatever it is. And I think they do the same thing offensively. So that would be the best way I could answer that.

Q. Where did you come up with the concept of championship week, 1-0 this week, we went would be 1-0 this week? Where did you learn that?

PJ FLECK: Well I learned that from when I was with Jim Tressel at Ohio State, in terms of one-game season. Because when you're at Ohio State, I mean, if you're not perfect, right? I mean, at least when we were there, if we weren't perfect, aww, 11-1. Boo. And that was my first coaching job. And I was like, oh, my goodness, right, and remember I just came from the 49ers and we were 2-14, 4-12, and now I'm coming into a National Championship program, right, a culture that's just tremendous, a National Champion head coach.

And to watch him handle every single week with the expectation and the pressure upon Ohio State -- it was the first, my first coaching job and it was one of the most influential because of what I learned about how to prepare a football team that was expected to win the National Championship from day one. We were No. 1 the entire year until we played Florida and lost. And in the National Championship. And I learned a lot that year. I learned how to be able to control all that. And that's how I'm just applying what I learned to these guys.

Q. You said that it's been it's been said that one of your most important recruiting jobs when you first came here was Antoine, on getting him to stay.

PJ FLECK: Still is.

Q. What went into that and was this kind of vision that you sold him on?

PJ FLECK: Antoine's coming for dinner tonight, by the way. He's over at the house. Isn't that right, Antoine?

It was. You know, I wouldn't even just say Antoine, and with all due respect to Antoine, it was everybody. When we first got here and the divide of what was happening, there was a lot of recruiting things going on inside the building that you had to. It wasn't just the high school players you had to go out and recruit, you had to convince everybody that they should stay. And we weren't going to have a football team. I mean, we weren't going to have even 85 scholarships. The way people were wanting to leave and move and transfer, I mean, I still remember -- I still remember the first week I had the job and we were at the Graduate Hotel and I literally didn't go to bed for four to five days. And it was just convincing people to stay, calling guys on their cell phone, getting to know them a little bit more. Because it was just, everybody was like, Listen, I don't know, I don't know about this. It was -- I don't think that was disrespect necessarily to us, I just think that

they had been through a lot of change and they had been through a lot of different things that it was just easier to go and just cut ties right now than believing, here comes this tidal wave of culture and maybe this drastic change, right, wrong or indifferent. So it was pretty much everybody. And that's why I give so much credit to the Winstons and Antoine Winfield, Juniors, and the Carter Coughlins and the Rodney Smiths, the Shannon Brooks, the Thomas Barbers, you look at all those guys who stayed, there's not many of them, but that stayed and not only stayed but did the right things and earned the right to stay as well and then found a way to continue to connect with each other and not only do that now become very, very special leaders, that's why we're powerful, because it's the leadership of our football team. And the more powerful of a leader -- you show me a powerful leader, I'll show you all the things that they have failed in in their life and there's going to be way more failing than succeeding. And that's what special about that senior class and they're a special, special group of young men.

Q. Antoine said after the game that his second interception came from film study. Basically he knew what they liked to do against single high, he was ready for it. How has that group been in terms of that, just preparation, film study, all that?

PJ FLECK: I tell you what, our secondary has played so much better than they ever have since I've been here. And I think part of that is, right, is one of it, it's always players. Your players got to go play. They got to be the reason you win. Players, it's a players' game, and they are.

But what we decided to in the off-season was divide our secondary into corners and safeties. And we went out and hired Joe Harasymiak, the FCS National Coach of the Year who took Maine to the semi-finals and if you can take Maine to the semi-finals of the FCS playoffs, you're a pretty darn good coach. And Joe Rossi had known him and he's a safeties coach and I thought he would be the best one to fit the personalities of that room. And then Rod Chance coming in to coach our corners from Oregon, who learned from Derek Mason, corner play, who I think is one of the best defensive backs coaches in the country, who is the head coach at Vanderbilt, and that's where he cut his teeth in the defensive back field. So having Rod Chance be able to have the whole meetings, everything being addressed just for our corners, just or our safeties -- because we didn't have a pass interference last week and we had seven, eight PBU's. The guys were in the right positions, they played their technique perfectly, and that was the first game that I saw across the board from our secondary that they played their technique as well as they could have played it and been in the right position and fundamentally sound the entire game. And that's hard to do. Because it takes a long time to get to that point. But you got to give those two coaches credit.

And then it comes down to the players being the reason -- and Tanner will tell you, Antoine did that to Tanner all off season. When he's in the middle of the field, it's not like you can look off the safety or it's not like, hey, he's on right hash, the guy can do go from not only hash to sideline, he can go from opposite hash to opposite sideline. And that's what makes him dangerous. And he's, Tanner can tell you, he's touched the stove a lot in the off-season. And I think Tanner learned a valuable lesson, it's not just the X's and O's, right, it's, you better not only know the system

of what that defense is playing, but you better know the personnel and you better know the capability of that person that's in the middle of the field or that half safety player or that quarter safety or whoever it is. I think that's where Tanner took his next stem of development and he probably should thank Antoine Winfield, Junior for that.

Q. Thomas Barber's tackle, second to last play. Can you speak about the significance of that and then what's his status for Saturday?

PJ FLECK: Yeah, he kept him out of the end zone. It was a heck of a hit, and kept him out of the end zone. There was a flag on the play which would have negated it any way, which was good. But he's fine, he practiced today. Which was really good. He got back on the field and did a really good job. So he's ready to go.

Q. What was the biggest benefit you noticed from the heavy personnel packages that you deployed?

PJ FLECK: Well I think it's just the ability to have more gaps and not only just have tight ends on the field, but getting extra linemen on the field, which creates different mismatches here and there. Creates different gaps, creates them to have a different personnel package. And then again it gives our, I think gets our six best players on the field up front. You get your best players on the field in certain packages, I think you're doing the right thing as coaches.