



Cincinnati Football Press Conference Quotes Tulane 27, Cincinnati 24 – Nov. 25, 2022

Head coach Luke Fickell

Opening Statement

“Tough one to swallow, more so for the seniors. What we put in this program and how we put those guys up to the pressure and not just me, but everyone in that locker room wanted to send those guys out the right way and we didn’t get that done today. It’s not from a lack of effort, it wasn’t from a lack of preparation. We knew it was going to be a battle. We knew it was going to come to the fourth quarter. We had to make plays in the fourth quarter, and we fought and fought, and it was back it forth. We got ourselves into a situation where we could win the game in the fourth quarter and we didn’t get it done. Everybody is hurting, but nobody is more than those seniors. They meant more than anything to me; this program and it's very difficult. With all the things that pile on, whether it is their last game in this stadium or not, with all the other things that are presented to you with a championship opportunity, it just hurts that much more. I don’t what else you can say about those guys and what they have done. They are special and this doesn’t define them. This doesn't take away from what they have done and their incredible success, but it does sting. We care so much because they care so much.”

On taking the lead late in the fourth

“Six minutes to go in the game, and it was reminiscent of UCF, and our ability to not give up a big play cost us. They [Tulane] had done a pretty good job all game. They moved the ball some and we didn’t play as sound against the run as we would have liked too. The biggest difference from last year to this year was the defensively was the ability to give up the big play. When its coming down the stretch, they are going to take some shots and you got to make some plays. You have to give them credit, they were aggressive like we were trying to be. They took some shots and made the plays. We still had an opportunity, we had to go out there and make another stop and had a chance to get the ball back, but you can’t put yourself in those kinds of situations.”

On exciting in big moments, especially fourth down, and having a sense that the team would come through in the end.

“That’s what this team has done, they have found ways. They have stopped two-point conversions, made fourth-down stops, they have rallied. That's what we were trying to do. We knew we had to be aggressive. We knew we had to take some chances, whether it was going for it on fourth down or anything thing, you know it was going to have to be an aggressive mindset because they [Tulane] are a really good football team and are very similar to who we

are. They can grind it out, they don't give up the big play and they did a better job of that than we did today."

On Evan Prater's performance

"I thought Evan [Prater] did a great job. I know he is heartbroken; he is crushed. We talked about all week taking care of, not just him, but taking care of each other. Taking care of him in particular, is not putting him in a situation at the end of the game with a minute forty left and no timeouts, that not taking care of him. Other than that, I thought he played with a lot of poise, played with a lot of confidence. You just never really know going into that situation, you figured he would, but sometimes some of those emotions can get to you. I thought he did an unbelievable job at handling all of those things.

On Tulane's coaching staff

"I don't know much about the school to be honest with you. I know he's done a good job. He's got a really good football team and he's got a lot of guys who are older and seniors. I think he's done it the right way and that showed. That's the difference between last year and this year. We didn't get to see the quarterback last year because he was hurt, but I knew he was a competitor. I knew he was tough. When you see those guys across the board. We see juniors and seniors and maybe that's the reason some people didn't pick them as high as they are right now, but you've got a lot of seniors and juniors and especially ones that are playing for you."

On Will Pauling's catch

"I don't know that I had a great look at it. I'll be honest with you, I thought it was out of bounds. So, I'm probably as bad as the officials. I'm always trying to think ahead, and then somebody upstairs said, I think he might have caught that thing and then we took a chance. I was kind of disappointed they didn't review it themselves but, you have some of those situations that you need to do it, so we had good fortune there. I think we had another one that might have been similar in that situation too. You want them to see some replays and you want some guys to help you out with that. You also don't want to lose your timeout. So, you've got to make some of those decisions really quick. From what for those guys were hollering, I probably wouldn't have done it."

On Tulane limiting Cincinnati's defense

"They packed it in a pretty good, they did a good job of protecting and taking their shots. That's where they got us down there. They weren't going to let some penetrations and they weren't going to give up minus-yards plays. They're a very sound group. They play really well fundamentally, and defensively, and they don't give up the big plays. They scored a lot of points when you look at it, but really, they're more of a grind-it-out team. They're going to take the shots when they can and they're not going to make mistakes. They're not going to give up those negative yardage plays. It did cost us a little bit because every time they did move the ball, you get into those third down situations where you can't get out to the quarterback because they're in four down territories, so you run the ball in third down. I thought they had a good plan, they weren't going to put themselves in jeopardy where the quarterback takes some shots, give up some negative yards' plays, and they took their shots when they needed to. We knew that

going in. We've had a little issue with some of those really good guys, especially the ones that can bounce and hit the edge a little bit is another area where we've given us big plays.

On evaluating the season

"I don't sit here and evaluate that right now. It's too hard to do that with everybody's hurting. So, we evaluate this game right now. It's disappointing and it doesn't put you in a position or situation where you want to be in, but you have to react and respond. Whatever is thrown our way we'll have to deal with. More so than looking at the whole season, we are looking at this moment right now. Everybody's disappointed, not just because we didn't win, but they're disappointed because of what they put into it, especially with the seniors have done."

On the unspoken goal of winning the championship

"I am not going to sit here and evaluate that right now. It is too hard to do that right now everybody is hurting. It is disappointing, does not put you in a position to a situation where you want to be. But you got to react to respond, whatever is thrown our way we'll have to deal with. More so than looking at the whole season we are looking at this moment right now. Everybody is disappointed not just because we didn't win, but they're disappointed because of what they put into it, especially with what the seniors have done."

On having a potential extra week in the championship game, the approach of that personally

"It is too hard to think about. Hopefully, there are some things that can happen, and we still have a chance to play. Time to probably think about those kinds of things that we back up. Take care of those seniors and make sure that our heads are up and ready with what is thrown at us in these next weeks."

Redshirt Sophomore Quarterback Evan Prater

On preparing for the game

"This moment I've been preparing for it so just making the most of it, trusting everybody. Everyone was coming up to me telling me, we believe in you, we know what you can do just go out there and be yourself. So I was just trying to be me, not trying to do too much. We've got a group of guys in the locker room around me that I know are going to go out and play hard. We all did and sadly we just came up short."

On the fourth-down pass to Tyler Scott

"Tyler's a playmaker and I know he's making that catch nine times out of 10 times, that's the one time that he didn't, but I'm extremely proud of those guys. We were battling to the final minute. That last drive I just wanted to go out there and get things started, it was kind of a slow start and sadly we just came up short."

On playing with Ryan Montgomery

"Montgomery was out there making plays, making dudes miss, and they are yelling when they miss, so it's pretty funny to see Montgomery do what he does. Chuck (Charles McClelland) was

the same thing. That room is just so good. They are playmakers and having that in the backfield with me is relieving.”

On his rushing game

“Just holding guys in spots so I can get Chuck (Charles McClelland) and Monty (Ryan Montgomery) those opportunities to make one guy miss. If they want to come in and play the box, we can pitch it out to you guys like Tyler (Scott), Jaden (Thompson) and Tre (Tucker). Let them go out there and make plays in space.”

On the three-fourth down conversions

“We're all just saying let's go get it. We got six inches or a yard and we know we're going to get it. The line was doing a great job getting pushes up front. And guys like Monty (Ryan Montgomery) were making one dude miss in the backfield and then has enough fuel to get that one yard, so knowing we have six inches let's push forward and keep this drive alive.”

On the vibe at Nippert Stadium

“Nippert is always rockin' we feed off that energy for sure. It took us a while to get in a rhythm at first, but that energy has a big influence on us, so I know it makes it hard for Tulane.”

On the message from Ben when there was knowledge of you playing

“He told me, ‘Just be you, you have been waiting for this opportunity, the opportunity is here, make the most of it.’ He has been supportive all week, it is sad to see him injured like that and not being able to play in moments like this. He has been there for me all week, sending me texts saying ‘Just be yourself, I am here for you if you need anything’ things like that. It was a big motivation and helped me, I appreciate Ben.”

On the play where Will Pauling was running down the sideline and his vision of it

“Just roll out to the right, I covered it up well and tried to make a play and I threw it and saw it had a little bounce on it. I knew that he could make that catch, then he caught off looking which I thought was intense right when he caught it. Then I came to the sideline, and everyone was saying that it was going to be reviewed, so just had faith. That was probably the best catch I have ever seen in person, so shoutout to Will Pauling. Huge moment for him, for an offense to just keep us rolling.”

On the drive that put them in the lead in the fourth quarter

“I was aware of the amount of time left on the clock and their offense was rolling all day doing their thing, I knew it was a big moment. The energy after our touchdown was very high, but obviously their offense very strong today and we could not get a stop. There was a lot of time left and we just needed to get it back and do it again.”

On the emotions of walking off the field and not having the championship back in Nippert

“It was really tough, I am sad because of the seniors that granted so much to this program. It is just tough for me to think of those guys not coming back, everyone keeps saying to keep my head up and we got things to do moving forward.”

Sixth Year Senior Linebacker Wil Huber

On Evan Prater

"He's had not a tough year but with the situation of always playing behind guys, he's done nothing but grind and stay in his mindset all year. Obviously, it's not good to see Ben go down but, having a guy like that, who knows that he worked every single day of the year for this moment, it's just incredible. He's going to be a great leader for this program."

On his first loss in Nippert Stadium

"There's no easy way to go through a loss and especially a loss at home. We haven't felt it a lot. It stinks. We wish it didn't happen. But ultimately, we didn't get it done today, we weren't enough today. It's something that we have to live with and move on. It makes us better as a team and makes me better as an individual."

On Tulane's run game

"I think that's something that they've prided themselves on all year. That's the reason that they're this good and were today. They have a very dynamic back, it's fierce. It's like the complete package. It's something they relied heavily on and can come back to it. In clutch times, we just couldn't put it away."

On Tulane's last scoring pass

"We go in thinking that they're going to go back to what they've been doing all game when they hit some shots, hit those one-on-one balls and shots are just part of the game. In the past, they've gone our way, but today they didn't. It's something that we're going to have to come back on Monday and fix up. But it's part of the game that we play, and we love you know. We can't go back and blame this on any one person. It is football and as much as we don't want to lose, everyone loses. This week, ultimately, we didn't get it done. It stinks to lose on a drive like that. It is what it is. We're going have to live with it and move on."

On the impact this team has had

"This team means the absolute world to me. The guys in that locker room and the coaches were the reasons that I came back for a sixth year. Nothing more than just to be a part of that locker room again. From the moment I walked on campus to today, I've grown so much as a person that can be attributed all the people. Including the guys that I played with, Coach Fickell, Coach Brady (Collins). I will leave this place better than I was when I got here. I know I'm going to leave this place better than I found it and I'm leaving a complete man ready to take on whatever facing me in the future."

On looking back at this year's team

"Going into this year, there was a lot of question marks about our team. It's hard to follow up a team like last year, but I'm not disappointed at all. I love this team. I'm proud to be a part of this team and what we put on the field this year. It is a year that we're going to look at it and say it was a success, maybe not the level that we wanted, but going on to the future, this is

something that we can continue to build on. We have a lot of young and really talented players in that locker room that have got a lot of experience this year. So, moving on next year to bigger, better things. I think they're going to be able to step up at a bigger level."