

Illinois Head Coach Bret Bielema Quotes

Opening statement:

"Going back to last Sunday after our game at Indiana. We got back to the stadium at about 3 o'clock, my office overlooks the walkway where the players walk. I sat there at my desk and watched those guys walk to their cars. It was three in the morning and I knew they were emotionally hurting but Sunday when I had the team meeting with them it wasn't like there was disappointment it was anger. They knew they had one that got away from us and I said to them. Listen, for us to win football games we can't lose them we have to do what we have to do. We have to play with an edge, we have to overcome things and today defensively the way they responded, our offense hit some stumbling blocks with turnovers and penalties, defense just kept sawing wood. I told our staff I made this game all about us on Sunday. Wednesday I sprung it on them that this was the first of seven re-match games. It's unusual to get an out of conference opponent as a re-match game, we have six more in front of us that come from divisional play. This was a big statement to me about where we were a year ago and where we are now. Virginia has new coaches and a majority of their players were there and ours were back, I wanted to see where we were as a program. For us to have the correctable moments we had today, to persevere and play that way. This bye week couldn't have come at a better time. I really like the way our schedule lays out to have this week to recoup and get ourselves back to fundamental football, especially offensively and get ourselves into the Chattanooga week. I think we are giving away free student tickets so hopefully we are going to have a loud crowd on that Thursday night. I know everyone loves those Thursday night games so we are going to try to do everything we can to get this place as excited as we can and get back into Big Ten play after that."

On his secondary:

"We have talented players, I showed those guys some clips this week and last night in our team meeting. I showed 10 plays of guys having really good fundamental plays. Good football plays are usually the result of good fundamentals. The way Ryan and Aaron coach them and teach them sound fundamentals, the pass breakups and pass rush. I thought our pass rush took a big jump this week getting off the edges. You saw Gabe and these young players get in at corner, I saw Kenenna and Dylan Rosiek. We get some young players in there and that's how you build things. You get young players to emulate players that came before them and that's how you build something. For us to be where we are now coming out of this

Virginia game compared to last year, especially defensively tells me a lot about where we are as a program." On corrections moving forward: "It is a correctable moment to play the way we did and win the game. The game really wasn't in distress, I was anxious. I specifically talked about ball security coming out of last week's game because I can see it. I watched the film and there were a lot of issues with plays from behind guys coming up and swinging. I coached them up on it and I give Virginia a lot of credit. I am glad they came alive in our win, usually those moments are correctable moments after a loss we can't have those. I know we will have their ears, eyes and attention this week with a bye week. It is a great way to get back to some fundamental ball security stuff."

On his tight ends:

"I was excited Marquese is a guy that has done everything for us since he got here, I just love the kid. He got in there and that play was a designed play. I showed it Thursday. It could have been all three tight ends and one of them could have run it, but we wanted to have a fresh guy in there and make a nice over-the-shoulder catch. Tip made a nice play at the back of the endzone. Luke getting involved in the kicking game that's a big step. We are doing good things, this is the first power five win against a non-conference opponent since 2011. I wasn't aware of that until now. We are not there yet, but I am excited where we are and where I think we could potentially go.

On owning the moment:

"Whitney Mercilus did a captain talk, it was unbelievably awesome. He waited a couple years here in this program and when his moment came he took advantage of it. One of the most impressive seasons you've ever seen a guy have, 16 sacks and nine fumbles. He told our guys he didn't miraculously get better, he took advantage of the moment how he approached that game. We talked about letting that dog out, Isaiah mentioned it this morning in our breakfast prayer. I talked to our guys about owning the moment, good or bad, there were bad moments in the first half that turned good. I really like our approach.