



BENGALS POSTGAME QUOTES

JAN. 4, 2026

CLEVELAND AT CINCINNATI

ZAC TAYLOR

Head coach

What was the biggest reason for today's loss?

"It's tough. It was a strange game, obviously. To give them 14 points ... I felt like we had pretty good control in the game and had a chance, really, to create a lot of separation, and then we gave them 14 points. The defense gives up six total — two field goals — and that's got to be enough to win. You know, you just look at (how) the little things just got us. We missed two extra points. We had two turnovers for touchdowns, and then they had a two minute drive to win the game. It's just frustrating. It's just frustrating — that's the biggest thing. And we just weren't able to finish it in some area (to) finish that game and find a way to get a win."

What did you tell the team after the game?

"It's a little bit fitting, to be honest with you, in terms of how our season's gone. That doesn't make it right. Several times we had games where we played well in different areas and we just hadn't found a way to put it all together. There have been games these last couple of weeks (where) we had, but this is one we needed to finish off. (This was) a divisional game, and this is how these divisional games go. It comes down to a play at the end (in a) one-score game, and we just weren't able to finish it off."

What was your view of what Cleveland was able to do to be successful on their final drive?

"They hit a couple of throws over there in the flat and got a couple chunks. I thought we did a good job stopping them for two plays, and then they get the one where they get 10 yards to get them closer and put them in field goal range, and their kicker did a great job finishing it off."

What do you think it's been where the team hasn't been able to close out games they were leading late? Is there something you feel you can address to correct that in the offseason?

"That's something where we're going to have to look (at it). To sit here today and give that answer is challenging. We'll reflect back and obviously, (if) we had the answer, we would have pulled it today. So that's just something we'll have to look at."

Was there a thought on the last offensive drive you had that you needed to score the touchdown but wish you had taken more time off the clock?

"It's hard. You'd love to score with one second left, but it's challenging. If you run it and waste a down on a zero-yard gain just for the sake of running the clock, it's challenging. We've been in that situation a lot, where sometimes we don't score on the first play and we don't do that, so it's, 'Let's go get points, get a stop and go win the game,' and it just didn't work out."

What makes it so tough when you're going up against Cleveland's defense?

"(Myles Garrett) is the best player on the defensive side of the ball. He's the best player and he wrecks every single play. You've got to account for him, they've got a really good defensive line — they've got a really good defense. I'm not just going to minimize it and say it's just a really good defensive line. They've got a good defense that's been challenging for every team they've played all season. You just look at the last couple of games they've played. They do a great job. They make it hard. You've got to earn everything. I thought we found some success at different points in the game and, you know, we just weren't able to score more than the 18 or whatever we scored."

The ending of the game, the defense has a chance to make a play and end the season on a high note. What kind of taste does this loss leave with you having games end like this so many times?

"Not a good one. Not a good taste."

You had a long conversation with the officials after Garrett's sack. Can you explain what happened there?

"There's five minutes left in our season — we're playing for our lives here — and I was never told we were going to stop the game, and in a critical moment like that. The refs just said they made a decision they were going to stop the game. They said they tried to do it as quickly as possible. I didn't feel that (way). We didn't sub, we were trying to be on the ball and go and play with tempo, and the umpire just held the ball so we couldn't do anything. I'm yelling at Joe (Burrow), 'Get on the ball — we didn't sub — we're going!' And we couldn't play."

"Again, trying to get an answer was not easy. They just said they made a decision as a crew to stop the game when that happened. I guess it didn't matter when it happened. They were just going to stop the game when it happened."

And you were not informed of that prior to the game?

"No. I was never informed of that. They didn't say one word. We meet with them in the 90-minute meeting before the game and they never said one word about that."

How did you approach this week regarding Burrow's play seeing how he played the full share of reps?

"Yes. Yes. We played that game to win the game in every decision we made. I know a lot was made of the Garrett sack record, and he's earned that. He's earned that. He's earned that because — and I say that because we weren't saying, 'We don't want to walk out of here without him breaking (the record).' We just wanted to win the game, so we were calling whatever we did to win it. But to his credit, the guy never — he rarely has one-on-ones, ever, ever. So for him to be able to do that and get that record ... I didn't track the other times that record was broken, but this was unbelievable he was able to do that with everything that's put on him on tape, minimized, and they don't play with leads typically. I'm not trying to take a shot at them, that's just the truth of it this year. So that's a credit to him, and he's earned that."

Why did you choose to bring in Joe Flacco on the quarterback sneak play he was involved with?

“Just (to have) a bigger body there. They were really loading up the front, if you saw some of those short yardage plays. Flacco’s obviously a much bigger body.”

You had some rhythm there on the drive where you took the lead late. What was working there, that maybe wasn’t working earlier in the game?

“I don’t think we had a lot of possessions, really. I don’t know what possession that was on (that) drive. We had one in the third quarter, if I remember correctly, and the quarter ended with one, so it just didn’t feel like we had a lot of plays in the second half. We had a bunch in first half, and not in the second half.”

Chase Brown went over 1000 yards rushing today and scored another touchdown for another consecutive week. Is his performance one of this season’s highlights?

“Yeah. I thought he had an outstanding season and (was) very dependable for us. He’s really worked hard to be the player that he is, so for the production to match that, I’m really proud of Chase. I’m proud of the guys up front that helped paved the way for those rushing yards. I’m proud of (running backs coach) Justin Hill. Justin has done a great job getting that room to reach its full potential. So I would say these milestones and achievements are bittersweet when it happens like this. At the same time, when a player puts lot of work into his craft and his career, you’re happy to see them reach those milestones that will be with them forever.”

How confident are you there’s enough brainpower in the building from coaching staff to administration this doesn’t happen next season?

“I’m very confident.”

Why?

“We have really good people and I enjoy working with them. This stings all of us, equally, and I just trust everybody.”

Evan McPherson had a great season and then had the two misses today. How unusual was that even though one was tipped?

“I think you have to factor that (since) one was tipped. The second one, to be truthful, I don’t have an answer for right now.”

What will the conversations be like with the front office?

“I’ll just keep those private to ourselves.”

Is there any long term concern with B.J. Hill’s calf injury?

“No, not long term. None of (the injuries) are long term. That’s all that matters.”

Is there any frustration that Cleveland seems to be the one division foe you don’t score that many points against?

“No. I think a lot of teams have a hard time scoring and moving the ball against them. We’ve beaten them the last four times (we’ve played) and we had a really great opportunity today to beat them for a fifth time. So, sometimes in this league, it’s not always pretty, and I wish we scored 50 every game and the production was outstanding. But there’s also times you go in and have a lot of respect for your opponent, and they’ve earned that. They’ve made it really challenging for everybody, including us. So, I know we feel that and our fan base feels that, but so does every team that walks into Cleveland and plays them. We didn’t find enough ways to score today to be able to separate ourselves.”

What will the next 24 hours look like for you?

“Meet with a lot of players. It’s the exit day for those guys, so we’ll have a team meeting in the morning. They’ll do their physicals, they’ll get with their positions coaches and myself as much as I can, and then we’ll let them be on their ways.”

As you move forward, what does it mean for you to have the support of Burrow and Ja’Marr Chase?

“We work really hard on the relationships. Those are important things. We want those guys to trust us. We work really hard to put them into great positions so they can get the most out of their abilities and help our team win. I think that they see that and they respect that, and the only way we can reach our potential with those two guys is if you’ve got a relationship to match it where you pour into them and they know that you want the best for them. I’ve worked really hard with those two guys as all our coaches have, and they’ve reciprocated that, so it’s a hard thing to do because you face a lot of adversity as a group. (You) go through a lot of ups and downs, and to do it with those guys is special, because of how hard they work and how much it means to them. I think to be a part of that, I don’t take it for granted. It’s something we work really hard at.”

JOE BURROW

Quarterback

Obviously, that’s not how you wanted to end the season ...

“Yeah, we beat ourselves today. False starts, turnovers, mental errors — it certainly wasn’t high-level football today.”

Is that the product of it being the end of the season, or was it just one of those games?

“It’s tough to say. We certainly can’t have the mental errors we had today. What caused that, I don’t know, but it can’t happen.”

How big of a game plan was neutralizing Myles Garrett?

“You have to if you want to be successful against that team. He’s the focus of our game plan every time we play him. It’s no secret. It’s challenging because you commit resources to that and it takes away resources elsewhere. For the most part, I thought we were pretty good against him today. You can see how impactful he is — we have no help on him one time and he gets one. I’m pretty sure it was him that put his hand up and knocked the ball down on the goal line for the interception. He’s an aware, elite player that you have to revolve your game plan around.”

How involved do you plan on being in the team’s plans this offseason?

“We’ll have those meetings the next couple of days. For the most part, we’re all on the same page about what we have to do and where we have to go. Without the meetings yet, it’s tough to say. I know they certainly value my opinion. I think about things critically, I think I can provide insight into things going on in the locker room and on the field that could help us win. I plan to voice some things just like I do every offseason.”

What do you want to see done most this offseason?

“It’s tough to say right now without talking to people. Those meetings will be done the next few days. I’m very confident in our coaching staff. I know those guys work really hard to put us in good positions and I always feel well prepared and put in the best spot to

succeed. From that standpoint, I think we're in a good spot."

Do you have the same level of confidence in the organization as you did to start the season?

"We all want to win."

Do you think your championship mindset is being matched by the organization?

"I sure hope so. I know everyone's frustrated right now. There's a disconnect during the season — we're down here focused on the day-to-day and trying to get better, and it's their job upstairs to focus on the big picture. I know they're committed to that."

How important will free agency be this March?

"That's of paramount importance. You have to identify where you're weak and figure out a way to be strong in that area. That's the NFL year in and year out. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't. You have to attack that period with intent to get better."

Are you surprised they stopped the game after Garrett's sack?

"Was I surprised? No. That's typically how they handle those kinds of situations."

Walk us through the play call on his sack ...

"It's tough to recall right now, the exact protection ID's on that. Certain looks, you can't have help on (number) 95 because of the potential pressure responses that they give, but it's tough to remember the exact call in that situation off the top of my head."

Does being this far removed from the postseason start to wear on you and add more pressure?

"We certainly aren't where we want or need to be. Not where I expected to be. Yeah, we have to figure it out."

Ja'Marr didn't have a catch in the second half until that last drive. Was there anything you guys did to open it up?

"No, not particularly. We wanted to come in and run the ball, try to mitigate the effect of their rush. I think we ran it well, but we got to a point in the game where we couldn't do that anymore, then we started dropping back and throwing it a little more. I thought we were effective."

They didn't have their top cornerbacks. Did you try to take advantage of that?

"We did take advantage of that for the most part. I thought we moved the ball well all day. It came down to them making a play on the goal line, and then we fumbled and gave them another seven points. Without those two corners out there, they certainly called the game a little differently. I also thought we responded well to that and had the answers to the coverages we were facing."

What can you do to be on the field more, since most of your injuries have been fluky?

"I don't know. I don't know if there's anything I can do. I work really hard to be great at this and put myself in a good position. Whatever that looks like, I'm not sure. I'll certainly think critically about that. Maybe make some changes, maybe not. Maybe I'll decide what I'm doing is great, and things just happen. But I'll think about it."

How are you feeling physically right now?

"I feel good."

How would you rate your performance since being back?

"I'm really proud of what I did this year. I came back from an injury faster than any human ever has. I'm really proud of that. I played some really good football when back. I had one bad game, and you certainly don't want those, but I won't lose my mind over that. I played some really high-level football."

Would you want to win Comeback Player of the Year? I don't know if you can win it coming back in the same season ...

"Would I be eligible for it next year? Maybe next year."

Can you block out questions of 'what could have been' after year six now, with all your injuries?

"Yeah, we're at where we're at. What's happened is what's happened. I certainly don't want to miss as much time as I have, but that's where I'm at. All I can do is evaluate the position I'm in and try to get better from there."

Why has the pursuit of happiness been such a theme over the course of this season?

"If you want to play this game for a long time, you have to enjoy what you do and who you do it with. Injuries take a toll on that. I think in life, I don't want to let losing and where our team is at affect all the other areas. I'm certainly not happy with where we're at, but I'm not going to let it affect who I am, what I do, and how I think about things."

Has that been a big shift?

"I think so. I work really hard at this, so it's a hard pill to swallow when I'm getting injured the way I am and we're losing the way we are. I haven't gotten that joy out of this that I used to. The joy that I got was winning. We certainly haven't had that success we expect. I'm not going to sit around and mope and be miserable to be around with my loved ones. I think it's growth and maturity."

Is there anything different you'll be doing this offseason?

"Yes, I have thought about it. Not critically to the point of change yet."

What's next week look like for you?

"Relaxing, being around friends and family. Stay up late, stay in bed late."

What's late?

"Who knows? I have no obligations for a while, so I'll go to sleep when I get tired I guess."

What are your thoughts on what Zac Taylor said, that this loss was fitting for this season?

"Yeah, its certainly a microcosm of how things have gone the last two years. We certainly expect to win that game and we didn't make the plays to do it. You can say that for a lot of games over the last two years."

How did the offensive line grow this year, and what was it like having Joe Flacco around?

"I think the O-line had their best year since I've been here. I didn't get to experience much of it at the beginning, but since I've

come back, I think it's the best that they've been. I think it's the best we've run it as well, and that has opened up certain aspects of our offense. I really enjoyed having Joe in the room, getting to know him, sharing laughs and stories. We had a great quarterback room this year that I didn't get to take as much part in it as I would have liked, but when I was in there I had a lot of fun."

Would him being back in the quarterback room next year make you happy?

"I'd love that. Number one, he played well when he was in there. He was fun to watch, and he brings a certain perspective. It's unique, you don't get to be around guys that have been around as long as he has. He's been valuable for us."

How much does going up against Myles Garrett test your internal clock?

"I don't go into a play thinking about it, but my natural instincts kick in and you feel him quickly and often. That affects how far you can push the ball down the field, the protections you can call, the plays, and how quickly you get the ball out of your hands. He's the best at what he does, and you try to mitigate it as much as you can with your play calls, protections and how your quarterback plays."

How big are these next eight months to get back into the playoffs?

"As big as it gets."

CHASE BROWN
Running back

You guys played really well down the stretch. What do you think was the reason why that was the case?

"I think we were just connecting on all levels. The O-line was doing a good job in run blocking, (and) we were making big plays down the field. When that all comes together, that's the Cincinnati Bengals offense. We were mostly grateful to find it, that's hard to find sometimes, especially with the way we started — the struggles we had been going through. In hindsight, it does feel great to find that."

You rushed for 1000 yards for the first time. How does that feel?

"I was 10 yards off last year. Got injured in Week 16 against the (Denver) Broncos. It feels good to finish off the year with that statistical number, but there's still a lot more we want to achieve as a team. We want to be in the playoffs, and we want to make a long postseason run. That's kind of where I am at now. Sucks that we're not doing that, but it feels good to end on a (statistical) positive."

You've basically rushed for 2000 yards the last two seasons, you seem to be a consistent player ...

"I try to do my best to do my job."

TEE HIGGINS
Wide receiver

It was a difficult season with the injuries and concussions, but are you happy with it from a pure statistical stand point?

"Forget about the statistics. I had no muscle injuries this year, so that's a positive. That's what I came in trying to do, and was able to."

You guys had so many close losses this year especially with how things ended today ...

"Obviously it was tough. We were able to put together a drive down there at the end. Got to look back on the first half — two turnovers for touchdowns. If we don't have those turnovers, we win the game. I can't even say, 'Let's get back to practice and fix it.' It's the end of the season. It was good to have a last drive like that to end the season."

It's three years in a row to not make the playoffs ...

"It's tough. You play the game to win championships. It's tough. All we got to do is get back next year and try and do it."

JA'MARR CHASE
Wide receiver

What is the key next year to finish off games?

"I think the biggest opportunity is putting ourselves in position in the beginning of the game, starting off fast. I've been preaching that for the longest. But I wouldn't say that's the biggest thing. We got to be disciplined, especially with the penalties today. Just execute ... executing our opportunities and the defense got to make plays."

How disappointed are you about this season?

"It was disappointing, yeah. It was disappointing how it went, but everything happens at the end of the day. You got sit here and think about the season highs, and how it went wrong."

You have known you won't be in the playoffs for a few weeks. Does this motivate you for next season?

"Everybody should be motivated who's been on the team the past 2-3 years. They know how it's been. If you go into the offseason and you're not motivated, especially with what has happened this past season, you shouldn't be on the team. You shouldn't play football, period. That's my say about that."

Are you happy with your numbers at the end of the season?

"Yeah, I guess it's all right. I wanted to score in our last game, (so) it's fine. It's cool."

JORDAN BATTLE
Safety

For most of the game, the defense was incredible, even though they scored a late field goal to win the game. How did you feel about the defensive performance today?

"We have made some huge strides in the second half of the season. We played a great game, even if we weren't able to finish today, but it was rough and it was a great game. We got to make some plays down the stretch to save the game, but that's what we're going to be working on all offseason. We had those chances earlier in the season, (and) missed too many of them. (We've) got to do better to close out games."

It must be a bad taste for you after how the defense played and then giving up that field goal at the end ...

"For sure, but 25 (Andre Szmyt) rules. We got to improve on it, and get back in there."

How much of a learning experience was it — not just for you, but for the entire defensive group?

"We fought all season ... I feel like the strides we made in the second half of the season were big for us. We had those extra

meetings and guys locking in, just going to another level. From the front to the back, it was much better. We improved a lot on missed tackles down the stretch. I just appreciated my teammates and my coaches putting in the effort to help us get better. We just need to finish off the way we started.”



BROWNS POSTGAME QUOTES

JAN. 4, 2026

CLEVELAND AT CINCINNATI

KEVIN STEFANSKI

Head coach

Initial comments ...

“Awesome team win. Real proud of those guys and the fight. Not exactly how you drew it up, to score twice on defense and for Andre (Szmyt) to finish it at the end. I mean, you can’t write a better script than that. For Myles Garrett, the way he got it in a really meaningful moment of the game and it came in a win, a great team win. So, I’m proud of those guys.”

What were you thinking as you crossed the 50-yard line near the end of the game?

“I would first start with Grant Delpit making a great play on the two-point conversion to make it a win, otherwise you’re going for a tie game. I told Grant as he came off the field, ‘Dude, that play, you just won the game because we’re about to kick a field goal.’ And then felt the conditions, as you know, were good for both teams in the kicking game. I felt once we got around the 35 (yard line), we were in good range for Andre (Szmyt).”

Just the way the season has gone for Andre Szmyt ...

“Incredible. Like I told you, you can’t write a better script. Game 1 against that same team, to then bounce back and be so good for this football team. I honestly don’t believe anyone on that sideline had any doubt in their mind that the ball was going through the uprights. That’s just who that kid is.”

How important is that moment for Shedeur Sanders with that drive to set up the field goal?

“I told him at halftime, that’s why it’s a 60-minute football game. We get to play 30 more minutes. We were not perfect on offense by any stretch of the imagination, but came through when we had to come through. We needed go on a drive to get into field goal range and made some plays. Again, (we have) a bunch of fighters on that team.”

Hearing you celebrate the win with the team, how much do you want to continue on with this football team, and do you think your job can be saved?

“Respectfully, this game is not about me. I told you guys that. I’m proud of that group for fighting.”

For this team, with the way this season has gone and all of the outside noise, it would be easy to not keep fighting. Could you tell the team had this kind of fight?

“Listen, there comes a time where you reflect. I’m not there yet. I’m just focused on this one. I knew all week these guys wanted to get this one. We wanted to even the series with Cincinnati. We dropped that first one of the season and weren’t happy about that. We and had an opportunity to go out here today and get a win. I’m really proud of the guys that stepped up in that game. D’Angelo (Ross) going in there at corner, Sam Webb going in at corner, guys going in and out with injury. Guys were unavailable pre-game — Carson (Schwesinger), Harold (Fannin Jr.), Dave (Njoku) — and guys stepped up. I think it’s a great thing to acknowledge with this football team. That’s kind of been the story of the season — step up. We need you.”

How fitting is it that Andre Szmyt kicks the game-winner in the final game of the season after missing in the season opener against the same team?

“Again, very proud of him. Confidence in him never wavered. I felt it was the right thing to do to keep where he was. He showed in practice all the time that he was very consistent. Like I said earlier, I had no doubt he would make that.”

Did you have a good look at Myles Garrett’s record-breaking sack?

“I did not have a great look. I didn’t.”

Could you believe they left Myles Garrett one-on-one on that play?

“You know, it all depends on how the game is going. When you’re in a game where they have to score touchdowns and be aggressive, you get the opportunity to have Myles rush one-on-one.”

With all respect to your previous answer, do you expect to be the head coach next year?

“And with all respect to that attempt by you, I’m not making the focus about me.”

What can you say about the moment when Myles Garrett broke the sack record and what it meant to all the guys on the defense?

“That’s history. He’s the sack king. That’s unbelievable. They’ve been playing this game for a long time, and for him to go get that in the circumstances with the degree of difficulty in which he got it this season is unbelievable. He’s the Defensive Player of the Year. You can make him the MVP, if I had a vote. I think the reaction of his teammates is genuine. That’s real. These guys care about each other.”

You have been vocal about defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz. Like everyone else, he’d like to be at the top of the profession. What would your endorsement be of him to someone else who would be looking at him as a head coach?

“I love Jim. I love working with Jim. He and I are cut from the same cloth. He’s deserving of those kinds of opportunities, and if that happens, I’d be thrilled for him.”

You didn’t work with Jim Schwartz before. What did you learn about him the past three years?

“Our offices are right next to each other, so we spend a lot of time together. We see the game very similarly. We see a lot of things about this game very similarly. He reminds me of one of my former coaches when I was playing, just the way he goes about his business. Jim and the entire defensive staff did a great job.”

The focus was never about Myles Garrett getting the sack record, but was there a big sense of relief when he got it?

“Yes, there was — about three weeks’ worth.”

In a losing season, what are you most proud of with this team for this season?

“Listen, you can look at all of it and you can analyze it, but we had to finish strong. We had two opportunities in these last two weeks against division opponents, and we got those wins. That’s what I’m proud of.”

With speculation swirling, how do you expect to spend the next 12 hours?

“I’m going to spend the next 30 minutes celebrating with this team.”

SHEDEUR SANDERS
Quarterback

Described the feelings, the emotions, and everything that goes through your mind as you’re leading the final drive down for that kick ...

“I say this a lot. I’ll say, all week I’ve been dealing with a lot spiritually — different battles that I just had to overcome. That’s why everything was off like that. That’s what it was. And when we went into halftime — in the locker room — close teammates, close friends, said to me, ‘Nah bro, get back to being you.’ So it was those words of encouragement, that shoulder to lean on, that you need in crucial moments like that. So then, as you saw right after halftime, then we started getting into our rhythm.

“So, I think today, overall, mentally, we won different battles. I think we won mentally. I think going back to the final drive that we had a couple weeks ago, and it wasn’t successful, but we were able to get that opportunity again and be able to drive down the field today and do what we did. Andre (Szmyt) being able to get back in that position ... I knew the whole time he was going to to make it. So, I think there were a bunch of different battles. Overall, we won today. It starts mentally.”

You knew how much Myles Garrett wanted to get the sack record in a victory. How important was it for you to, on his big day, in his big moment, go down there and do everything you could get him that victory?

“Yeah, I think all of our goals are aligned. I think the ‘want to’ is to prove that I’m able to drive down the field. A bad half doesn’t define a character, like how it was the other week when we had the same opportunity. So, I think, week-by-week, it was building different things and accomplishing different things and being able to prove to myself. Not just myself, but with this team and everybody that in certain situations I learn from and I grow (with). And I was just excited to be put in a situation again. I put myself in a situation.”

What did you see on that last drive?

“I think it was just quicker. I think it was just quick, and I think we got back to what we have been doing, honestly. And I think being able to go through the keys and reads — those are the (things) that I know like the back of my hand. That’s where reps come into play too. That’s when you’re able to execute each and every play, no matter what defense they put out there. So, I think we got back to being who we are and not really going at them a certain way. That was good, but sometimes it just didn’t fit my eye, and I wasn’t able to get through my reads quick enough or play really fast and on time.”

You said you were dealing with something spiritual. What was it?

“I’m able to recognize it, but it’s in the mental. I think the devil, of course, is going to attack you in different ways and the people around you. Honestly, this whole year — been a long year — (there have) been ups and downs. They’ve been different feelings. You have to be able to, at some point in time, talk to people and lean on people also. My guys in there (the locker-room) were able to really come to life. Whenever they talk to me, they tell me, ‘Do you. This isn’t you right now!’ That’s the type of stuff that gets you going. That’s the type of positivity and stuff that you need around. You need people to let you know who you are. You feel me? So I need to continue to be that guy. I think a lot of it was that. Today, I wasn’t surprised that I didn’t initially come out and play a clean game. But the main battle for me today is what’s going to happen whenever you face adversity? Whenever you’re not seeing that, it is good. Whenever you’re a little bit slow on things ... what are you going to do? And that’s, I think, was the lesson for today. It was to be able to overcome. And after the last drive, it definitely happened.”

I know it’s only 45 minutes after the game. What have you learned about yourself, this season? And how important was it for you to finish the game this time?

“Well, I learned what I like. I learned what I don’t like. I learned what I see, and what I don’t see, well. I learned a lot mentally, and I learned a lot physically. Mentally, it was how to deal when things are going your way and when things aren’t going your way, and how to deal with feelings. So that’s what I feel like this year was about. I think it was one of those years about dealing with the feelings. You could not play and feel some type of way, and you could be playing and feel the same way as if you weren’t playing. You have to create your own reality. You have to have the nucleus of people around to be able to do that. And it’s not just your family. It has to also come from outside. So, I think that’s what this rookie class was, and that’s what everything is. It’s being able to lean on each other when everything is down and for them to be able to come to me and say, ‘It’s not you bro. You’re tripping right now, and you have to get back to doing you.’ That’s what I need. I need positivity. I need that type of stuff. Having them speak life into you. Then you go out there and you get back to playing normal. You get back to seeing the game how you see. So, a lot of that stuff is mental stuff. It’s not physical. The physical (stuff) has been the same. Of course you’re going to be able to improve this offseason — footwork, seeing stuff quicker, and everything like that. But I think the biggest lesson of this year was (a mental lesson), and I feel I achieved and I won that.”

Can you put yourself in the shoes of Joe Burrow. What is it like when you have Myles Garrett coming after you?

“Well, I don’t know. I know in practice when we go ‘situation’ (situation play calling), I’m aware of him. Overly so. I can’t put myself in anybody else’s shoes that I can’t relate to or feel.”

Obviously, there’s a lot of speculation about Kevin Stefanski’s future. How nice was it just to finish the season with a win for him?

“Coach Kev, he’s been real tough. He’s been tough. And it’s good. I think I grew and learned a lot from him. I think this week we had a conversation, just about things in general. I feel like we grew to understand each other. We share different things that we both will go through. I know he wanted this win, and I know he wants every win, but I know this one means a lot. I wish we as a team, and I wish everybody, could have more (wins), personally, within this last year, because Shi (Shilo Sanders) came over my house a couple of days ago during a dark time. He came over and was just talking and speaking life to me. And that’s what I needed. And I’m truly thankful for him and his presence definitely is.”

We don’t often hear a celebration like what we just heard through this door with you guys in that locker room with all the cheering and yelling. What does it say about this football team, that you guys are celebrating a moment like that?

“I think that we have each other’s back. I think without the defense, we weren’t going to be able to do anything. I think without us as an offense and being able to drive down the field ... they did everything they could do. So that was really good to be able to win the game. I think the tough battle of us just leaning on each other, depending on each other, in those key moments — that’s how you build trust. That’s how you build friendships. Whenever you go through those key moments, you’re able to rise to the occasion, no matter if we had failure before. There was no doubt in my mind that he (Andre Szmyt) was going to go make that field goal, because of his trials and everything he went through at the beginning of the year. Even in that instance, that’s when he and I connected. How you deal with certain stuff and being able to talk to him, being able to be the source for him, and him go on and have the successful season that he had, I think it was truly amazing. Of course, that’s how the story goes. And I’m thankful it ended like that. Thank you. Now I have to go see my brother Shilo (Sanders).

MYLES GARRETT
Defensive end

How did it feel to get the record? What was that moment like for you?

“It was everything I expected. It was so tough. I knew they were going to make it difficult, but shoot, I don’t think I saw more than three singles (matchups) on a real drop back the whole game, and I knew if I did, I’d have to make that moment count. And the feeling couldn’t be better.”

Did you ever start to wonder about the sack given how much time was left?

“I think I said earlier, but I had a dream that didn’t get it. So, I was like, well, shoot, we’ve got to deny fate. Whatever it is we’ve got to make it happen. I just went into it and still had the utmost confidence in myself and my preparation, and in my guys, man. I couldn’t do it without them. They were supporting me, trying to find ways to free me up, get the chips off me, get the doubles off, and eventually we just made it happen as we have all year.”

What was the whole celebration like?

“It was special. I’ve given everything to them. They give their very best every day and I’m so grateful, so I’m glad to have them as teammates. Like I said, it’s a privilege to be with these guys, to go to work with these guys, to bleed, to sweat and to the cry for these guys. I couldn’t imagine doing it with a better group of men. (They are) always coming in with a great attitude, working hard and coming with a smile on their faces, and they never get too high, never too low. I’m so proud of this group.”

What was the level of adrenaline and exhaustion in the second half for you?

“I wasn’t even thinking about it, honestly. Anytime I started thinking I was tired or the fatigue setting in, I thought about that dream. I picked my butt up. It was time to go.”

What were the conversations around the first drive of the second half when you didn’t leave the field at all?

“Yeah, I felt like Micah (Parsons Jr.) out there, moving around everywhere. They were just scheming it up trying to get the chips and the doubles off me. I know they said they weren’t going to do anything crazy to deny me the sack, but hell, they schemed it up to the point where it was starting to feel like that. I mean, he (Joe Burrow) went out there, tried to win the game and we made the plays that we needed to. But credit to (Jim) Schwartz. He was doing everything he could to get not only myself free, but all of us free. Then Grant (Delpit) came in with the sack a little bit earlier, and then we just kept on getting pressure and those batted balls came in clutch at the beginning of the game.”

How great was this win for Andre Szmyt?

“I mean, once we got in field goal range, I knew he (Andre Szmyt) was going to seal it. You know, this is the moment that he’s been waiting for. Doing it against a team that, unfortunately, he came up a little bit short with at the beginning of the year. I know he’s been waiting out the second crack at this, and you know, God willing, he went out there and put it right down the middle. So, I was excited. I love winning, so it didn’t matter whether it’s beginning of season, end of the season, last game of the season — I’m just proud of him and glad to have a win.”

Did Joe Burrow say anything to you in the moment of the sack? Was there any exchange after the game?

“I couldn’t talk to him after (the sack) because my teammates were grabbing me up. So, I was trying to get to him after the game, but there were different outlets and my parents were coming down, so it was a lot of people pulling me in different directions, but you know, I have a lot of love for Joe (Burrow). He’s a hell of a guy and hell of a player. I hope to catch up with him this offseason. He sent me a text, and I’ll keep what he said between him and I, but he’s exceptional, all around.”

What did you see on the sack? Did it feel like the perfect Myles Garrett sack?

“Yeah, I mean that was the stereotypical sack for me. Getting off, doing the chopping and right into the dip. And I was watching the clock. I knew that the next time he gave a count, it was going to be that they were gone. So, I was just watching the ball as quick as I could and they had a couple other tells that gave me the snap count. So, as soon as I saw that, it aligned. It’s probably the best get off I’ve ever had, trying to get that sack, and the rest is history.”

What was the level of adrenaline and exhaustion in the second half for you?

“Despair. I was scared as hell. But shoot, I woke up at 7 or 6:30 a.m., and I told my guy Jon (Lee), I was like, ‘Let’s eat and let’s talk. We’ve got to talk through this and just prepare early, cause there’s no way we’re going to allow anything in the way of history.’”

There were a couple of times you almost had Joe Burrow, and there was one time when it looked like he looked back?

“That was disrespectful. He knew who was chasing him. But credit to him, he’s got wheels. Anytime he’s healthy, he’s a threat to scramble out the pocket. I was just like, ‘Please, someone, just pull him up or stay behind the line, do something, run out of bounds.’ But I’m glad to go against a competitor like that.”

What does it say about this group that you finished the season with a dramatic win today, but also to win two in a row going into the offseason?

“I’ve got to be the same person every single day (and) come with that same intensity. No matter the result, the outcome, you do this for the journey. There’s suffering in the journey, there’s failures in the journey, but that’s the price we pay for giving everything that we have. No one is going to win the Super Bowl every year. No one is going to go to the playoffs every year. But that fight to get more, to achieve more, wanting more for yourself and for your teammates — that’s what’s going to drive us to success. And coming off two wins at the end of the season, especially against teams that we lost earlier too, that’s the kind of momentum we need to carry into the next season. We need to appreciate and be grateful for the guys that we have around us and look forward.”

I know you’re careful about curating your walk-up songs. How did you settle on Kanye West for this one?

“‘I Wonder?’ Hey, find your dreams come true. I mean, I’ve been waiting on this my whole life, my whole football career. So, I knew I had it in me and man, I wanted that 25 (sacks). But they made it real difficult these last two games especially, or really these last three. But that’ll be the next journey, to try to go out there and get 25.”

How are you going to celebrate this?

“Some pizza and ice cream. Probably get some Garrett oatmeal tomorrow morning, and sometime soon go back to Texas to see my family.”

Your dad had a camera lens as big as his head in the stands. What does it mean to you to share this moment with your parents?

“Tell him he’s got to stop bringing that thing. But it means a lot that they could be here. I wanted to do it for myself, but I wanted so much to bring pride to my last name — my dad, my mom, and all those who came before me. Especially my (grandmother), who hasn’t been here for a while to see this, but I carry into the game every single time I walk onto the field. That’s the kind of pride I have when I walk onto the field, whether it’s practice, whether it’s games. I’m just knowing and grateful of who came before me, who made this possible. And it’s a privilege that I’m even here, not only playing the game with the Browns, but you know, even doing this in general. This could have been a whole lot different — me playing with the Cavs (Cavaliers), if things were a little bit different. But I’m grateful that they helped keep me on the straight and keep me on the right path, and now we’re here.”