

Eichenberg Discusses Range Of Emotions Following Michigan Loss



Tommy Eichenberg has always been a soft, short-spoken personality in press conferences. Hearing him be blunt is nothing new.

Hearing him be poignant about a topic, however, makes one take a step back. That's the reaction Eichenberg invoked when he waxed about his emotions following the Michigan game.

"I was feeling like I let everyone down," Eichenberg said. "I didn't do what I needed to do. It was tough."

As head coach Ryan Day indicated following the team's selection, Ohio State's backdoor entry into the College Football Playoff injected a new energy into the team. That could be as true for Eichenberg as it is for anyone else on OSU's roster.

"Next week, coming out, seeing the top four, that was amazing," Eichenberg said. "It just felt like a new life, really."

Football's always been the ultimate American team game. Elsewhere in the world it's soccer, but in the United States, football is the test of how cohesive a unit 11 people can form. One man caught out of position can drag the other 10 down. Still, the nature of the sport is such that it's typically impossible to pin blame on any one player.

The fourth-year linebacker knows this as well as anyone. It doesn't stop him from feeling personally responsible for the Buckeyes' loss to Michigan.

"As a captain, I take it as my job to get everyone, including myself, ready (to play)," Eichenberg said. "Which, I know we were ready. But it's my job to get the whole team, the whole defense ready, hold guys accountable."

Statistically it doesn't bear out that Eichenberg shoulders the defeat as much as he indicates. He made seven tackles against the Wolverines, three more than anyone else on the team, and didn't miss a single time. In coverage he allowed just 9 yards on two receptions through three targets, a measly 3.33 yards per target per Pro Football Focus.

All of Ohio State's players took the loss hard, of course. That's the nature of losing to an archrival one spent the entire year focused on getting revenge upon.

"Everybody took it personally. Everybody wanted to win that game," fourth-year defensive end Zach Harrison said. "And we didn't. But we've got a second chance at life, we've got to take advantage of that and do the most with it."

But it's an extra step Eichenberg went through in his sorrows. He's taken on the role of leader for Ohio State's defense since spring, the middle linebacker being the centerpiece everyone else keys off of.

"I think Tommy has been a great leader for us," Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said in March. "I really like what I've seen from Tommy. He's mastering the defense quickly and making plays. He's quiet, but he's fierce."

Eichenberg made a team-high 112 tackles during the regular season — the most by an OSU player since 2015 — and was a unanimous first-team All-Big Ten selection. PFF and Bleacher Report named him a first-team All-American, three other organizations put him second-team.

The loss to Michigan Nov. 26 may have been the darkest day of Eichenberg's football career to date. But thanks to Utah's win over USC that snuck Ohio State into the playoffs, a shot at redemption has brightened his disposition. Asked about his level of motivation entering bowl prep, there was a long, intense pause from the Ohio native while considering his response.

"Just how we've been practicing for the last few weeks, it's like, 'Hey, the past is the past. We're not going to take anything for granted now,'" Eichenberg said. "We're going to practice as hard as we can, we're going to prepare as hard as we can, because we know we can do this."

Eichenberg and the Ohio State defense get their shot to right all their leftover negative emotions from The Game against Georgia in the College Football Playoff Dec. 31. An upset of the No. 1 Bulldogs and revenge over No. 2 Michigan should it beat No. 3 TCU is all on the table if the team can take it. Oh, and a national title, of course.