

Minnesota 40, Illinois 17

Memorial Stadium // October 29, 2016 // Attendance: 40,090

Illinois Head Coach Lovie Smith

Opening statement:

"As far as a great Homecoming weekend as a football team, it's hard to win when you start off that way. I'm putting a big emphasis on trying to get momentum early on in the game and those turnovers early on, those fumbles, put us in a hole. When you're not a good football team yet, it's hard to overcome adversity like that. I think offensively, Jeff did some things better than he did the week before, he was under a lot of pressure. We were never really able to get our running game going, which hurt us. Defensively, the guys played hard. When you're minus three in the turnover ratio, they got something. 'No takeaways,' is a thing for us, it's a tough duty to win. Injury wise, it's always concerning when a player goes off on a cart or stretcher but Malik Turner will be okay, he's in the locker room right now. We had some other players that went down with injuries; I'll be able to let you know a little bit more details later in the week. Wes Lunt, questions have been asked about him, he is getting better. He's dressed so that's progress. At the same time, you have to give Minnesota a lot of credit. They caused the turnovers early on and hung in there and got a win. Again, we aren't there yet but we will keep plugging away."

On the injuries this season:

"You adjust based on what you have and we realize we have injuries right now."

On younger players playing:

"It's not like we are trying to be in 'play young guys' mode, we are still playing the players we feel give us the best opportunity to win and some freshmen have just got that opportunity."

On what he tells recruits:

"I think most recruits are looking at how they fit into the team next year and I think a lot of recruits see that they have an opportunity to play a little bit sooner than they would at other places so hopefully that sells it."

Minnesota Head Coach Tracy Claeys

Opening statement:

"I thought our kids had a good week of practice, and where we wanna go we need to win so that's what we've talked about. We used up all our margin for error and with the Iowa loss at home we felt we needed to make up for the next two on the road and we were able to do that."

On running backs:

"They're two good backs. I don't know if anybody has any combination of them between the two of them. I think if you're gonna go down, you're gonna go down with your best. So we're putting the ball in our best players. Those two guys run awfully well. The drive we had with the four third downs was big for our confidence to get the win."

On becoming bowl eligible:

"Our goal is to do something a lot more than get to bowl eligible. We've been to five bowls in a row now. Our thing is we get to November we want to have an opportunity to go to Indianapolis and right now we're in that position. We've won enough games in October so we've got to take it one game at a time and we'll see where it goes."

On Duke McGee's targeting penalty:

"When those guys are going down low it's hard to avoid that but it's a rule and we'll go to work. I hate to tell him to go down on the legs all the time but then they would be putting their heads down on the tackle and we gotta stay below the shoulders but I like the way of how aggressive they are."

On preparing for Illinois' quarterbacks:

"It made it tough because we didn't know who was gonna play. We've played against Wes (Lunt) before and he can throw the rock, he's a good quarterback. So we had to spend some time with all of them and that's why it caught us off guard at the beginning there. But overall I thought our staff adjusted well and our players adjusted well to it."

Illinois Redshirt Freshman Quarterback Jeff George Jr.

On what he has learned over the past two games:

“Gotta protect the ball. Turnovers are what gave them a short field, and what made it easy on them. I’ve just got to protect the ball at all costs.”

Illinois Senior Defensive Lineman Carroll Phillips

On the defensive mindset after a turnover:

“The coaches always talk about keep pounding. Just keep playing hard, and don’t worry about the scoreboard. You have to keep excuting the defense and try to make big plays.”

Illinois Senior Wide Receiver Zach Grant

On his first touchdown catch:

“It’s a special feeling. I’ve been waiting for it for a long time. It’s been a while since I’ve been in the endzone so it was definitely a special moment for myself and my family in the stands.”

On team morale:

“It was obviously an upsetting loss, but you’ve got to bounce back from it. It’s over now, and we’ve got to move forward. We’ve got Michigan State next week so we’re focused on them. Clean up the tape, and move on.”

Illinois Redshirt Freshman Running Back Reggie Corbin

On Malik Turner’s injury:

“That was probably the second worst thing I’ve ever seen in my life. It was awful to see him have to go through that. But it made me want to play harder for him, and I think we tried to do that.”

Minnesota Senior Wide Receiver Drew Wolitarsky

On the team being bowl eligible after today's win:

"We're messing around in there saying we're going bowling. But again, we're looking to go further and be contenders in November. Big Ten championship is our sights so that's what we'd be content with. Yeah, we're bowl eligible but that wasn't the goal. The goal was to do more than that. We're happy, we're gonna celebrate, but we're also gonna go back to work on Monday and Tuesday."

On running for a big gain after a reception:

"I just trust the game plan. I trust my routes, trust my guys to make the nice picks for me. It turned out to be nice and open so that's always fun. It's always fun to run."

Minnesota Redshirt Senior Quarterback Mitch Leidner

On using 2014's loss at Memorial Stadium as motivation:

"I think that was a lot of motivation. Something we emphasized all week was creating a lot of energy and focus down here at Illinois."

On having a next play mentality after mistakes:

"There's some things you just can't control. You just gotta come back the next play and be ready to sling it."

Minnesota Sophomore Running Back Shannon Brooks

On the benefits of having shorter drives due to Illinois turnovers:

"That's a big momentum booster. As an offense, we love to see that because we're pretty good in the red zone. So, any time we get in the red zone we really feel confident out there that we can get points."