

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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DeShone Kizer

Q. Denbrock mentioned Monday that he had a conversation with you about kind of becoming the old DeShone like at Virginia, running down the field, arms in the air, showing a lot of emotion. Is it important to add that back to your game?

DeSHONE KIZER: I don't necessarily think that it's been removed. I am who I am, and it's easy to run down the field and have your hands up when you're winning games. That's the easiest way to put it. It's not fun to lose, and I'm not going to go out there and pretend as if it is. I do believe that that style of energy needs to come out every day of the week rather than just in positions where we're winning, and I think that those vibes will kind of wing you throughout the team and have a positive attitude that allows us to play better ball. But yeah, I definitely need to reach back in and have some fun, and that's kind of the ultimate goal this week is to have some fun and play the game that I love. And hopefully you'll see a little more of that, because if we are out there having fun and playing the way we know how to, we'll go out and we'll start winning games, and those smiles and those moments will come back.

Q. And this is right now one of the higher scoring Notre Dame teams in history. As you try to get this team a victory once again, do you have to guard against pressing and trying to do too much at times?

DeSHONE KIZER: No. No. At this university under Coach Kelly, within this offense there's a lot that's put on the quarterback, and we all know it. And that's enough. And that's what I have to understand and I think I do understand is that I don't need to take on any more than what they give me, and they already give me a lot. And that's kind of my mentality heading into the week is just to play free, have fun. I get the opportunity to be the quarterback of University of Notre Dame. That is a privilege that people dream about, that I dreamed about, and I took the fun out of that. And that's my biggest regret in the first four games is I had so much love for this position, love for this team that I took on a lot more than I ever should, which put a lot of pressure on my back, and that's something that I'm going to have to remove and go back to just doing what I love and having a good time. And when I'm doing that, that's when we're playing our best ball as a team. And I believe that our whole team is buying into that understanding and buying into that idea. And practice yesterday was a blast. It was a good time to go out there and play football, to play free and have a good time. And today's practice will be the same. Saturday will be the same. And there will be a W on that column when we go out there and we play the way we know how to.

Q. How do you balance playing free and loose? Obviously there's a lot of pressure when you're 1 and 3 at Notre Dame and Notre Dame's not used to being in that position.

DeSHONE KIZER: You balance it by taking the responsibility given to you and not adding any extra to it. Like I said, this position here in this offense has already handed a lot, and I'm going to take those responsibilities that are given to me, do the best I can with them, and that's it. There's no more to it. That's where I found my biggest flaw in those first four games and even going back into last season, the last two, I think that I saw this position as a lot bigger than what it was and tried to take on way too many things. Now it's just about going out and playing. There's so many worries that you can add to this. There's so many things that you can build on your shoulders to think you have big shoulders to do it. But to me I think that my biggest thing that I need to focus on moving forward is to just go out and play and just execute what's being told to me and trust in the leadership and trust that what they're saying that I need to do is exactly what I do need to do and nothing more and nothing less.

Q. Coach Kelly has talked a lot in the last couple of days about standard of play and how you haven't met that standard. How close or far away do you think you are to that standard?

DeSHONE KIZER: You know, standards, that's a topic in which I believe is something that is completely personal for myself, because there's no standard out there from Coach Kelly, from the fanbase, from my team that's going to be higher than mine. I'm substandard to my own standards, and that's all that matters. And if I can go out and attempt to stay above that standard of my own, then we'll be fine. Substandard is a term that kind of grasp each and every rep you can look at it substandard and look at it from game to game, from season to season, from rep to rep. For me, my goal is just to play the best I can and to represent my quarterback room and the offense the best I can. And the standards that I have will always be a lot higher than anyone else's, and that's all that matters. I just gotta go out and play better ball.

Q. Tangibly what would that standard consist of?

DeSHONE KIZER: Standards are -- there isn't a set law. There isn't me sitting here saying, hey, look, here's all 525 things I need to do today to be above standard. Standards is going out there and just simply executing. If we are 4 and 0 right now, standards are met to a certain extent, because we won four games. If I throw for 500 yards, standards are met to a certain extent, but there's so many other things that go into that that we all see now that caused us to be below standard, and to sit here and find it and try to focus up on those would be a mistake on my part because by focusing up on things that aren't relevant to us winning a game is not good for the team. All I need to do, my standard right now is to do whatever I can to help lead the offense to get a win. We're 1 and 3, and that's unacceptable, and my only goal right now, my only mission is to buy in to everything that's been said in this meeting room right here to get a W on the board because that's all that matters at this point.

Q. Just curious, you're obviously in the meeting rooms with Montgomery VanGorder, can't be easy working for the school that just fathered your father. Have you said anything to him? How has he handled these last couple of days?

DeSHONE KIZER: Yeah. Montgomery is my best friend on this campus, and it's definitely a rough situation. But that kid is a really strong guy and he's focused up on doing whatever he can right now to help Notre Dame win. That issue is something that we'll keep to ourselves, and he's done a good job in the last few days of focusing up on his job and I know he'll go out and give his best efforts to contribute to us improving and getting a win.

Q. Talking about the standards, is that something you've always had, you've always set high standards for yourself, going back to high school, grammar school?

DeSHONE KIZER: Yeah. Like everyone. We all have standards. You guys have standards and what you want to put down on paper and how you want to go out and do your job. And I know that each and every one of us push ourselves to be the best person we can be, so yeah, I've always had very high standards for myself, and I'm never satisfied. That's the best part about playing the sport in general, the challenge that there's always something better you can do. There's no such thing as perfection in football. To a certain extent, standards are never met, unless you have a ring on and you're undefeated. That's kind of the only goal. You know, for me I want to do whatever I can to help this team win. And for now, instead of focusing up on a thousand different things, all I want to do is to see the smile on my teammates' face and our coaching staff's face after we get a W this weekend, and from there we'll move forward. Standard right now is simply getting a W.

Q. For you personally handling being on a 1 and 3 team, how have you kind of approached it? Is it kind of like you said, with always trying to meet that high standard, always trying to get to that point where you guys do win games or how have you guys kind of approached where you are right now?

DeSHONE KIZER: One thing I've taken away from kind of evaluating this rocky start is that I need to just focus up on today, what can I do today, what are the things that I can control. And right now what I can control is my attitude, my effort and my relationships with my teammates. And that's what's going to hopefully prepare us to get a W. You know, I think I misspoke after the game saying that we need to find more guys with passion, we need to find more guys with fire and energy, because I believe that maybe our biggest issue is that we're too passionate. We love this game too much. Therefore, we're all trying to take on responsibility ourselves and put too much on our back. That's Notre Dame's biggest issue is that my teammates love me too much, and that's going to allow them to go out there and play tense. They're not playing free. We're not playing free. We're not playing fun. In these past four games we're out there completely grinding for something other than to represent ourselves, represent our families and represent Notre Dame and trying to get Ws, and I think that goes to show that this locker room is a bunch of high-caliber guys who understand things at a higher level, and with that they took on more responsibility than they ever needed to. Yesterday's practice and the mindset of the team right now is one that is taking away that stress, that added stress that we don't need. We just want to go out and have a good time now and do whatever we can to get wins. There's a lot more on the line now than just trying to accomplish a long-term mission. Right now we're focused up on today, how we can control ourselves and how we can control our attitudes and efforts and moving forward to get a W.

Q. Do you feel like when you're 1 and 3, that you're trying to do things that are out of your control sometimes on Saturdays or even during practice during the week?

DeSHONE KIZER: No. Right now the mentality is that we hit a rough patch, we had a rough start. That start is over. We're 0 and 0 this week. We're just trying to go 1 and 0 this week, and with that, once again, we've focused upon Sunday on how do we eliminate all the things that have happened in the beginning and focus up on how we can get better today and how we can have the right approach to go and be successful today and to better ourselves and trying to get a win against Syracuse.

Q. When Coach Kelly told you guys as a team that he had fired Coach VanGorder, what was sort of your reaction to that?

DeSHONE KIZER: We lost a great coach, a great football mind. We all know that Coach VanGorder is a guy who understands defense unlike anyone else. He's very good at some of the things he does. But there's a lot more to this game than understanding defenses. There's a lot more to this game than your -- what I'm trying to say here is yes, we lost a great coach, but things needed to happen for us to move forward. Coach Kelly makes the decision. We trust in whatever he has to say, and moving forward we'll make the adjustments that need to be made on the offensive side of the ball to pick up our defense and to start playing games and getting Ws.

Q. What are your interactions like with Coach Kelly on the sidelines, in the last couple weeks specifically when things are maybe not going that well? Is it give and take? Do you feel like you just have to listen? Does it he want input? Does he just want to blow off steam? What's that interaction like?

DeSHONE KIZER: It's different rep to rep, drive to drive. If you're playing well, it's great. If you're playing bad, it's not so great. Coach Kelly and I have great communication skills on the sideline, and I think that's one of our best attributes to our coach-to-player relationship is that when I come off to the sideline, we're able to get things done. And that's something that not a lot of guys are able to do at the college level without the iPads, without the pictures that come from up top. It's hard to communicate on the sideline and get the looks and make the adjustments, and we do a really good job with it, and I believe that we're really productive and making sure we make adjustments within games. When we're not doing so hot, yeah, there's a lot more negativity that comes into those conversations, but at the end of those conversations, there's definitely always productivity moving forward in the game, and we'll continue to have that productivity in our communication on the sidelines and put together some more successful drives.

Q. When you hear him get up here and say I'm going to be more animated, I'm going to like be more passionate on the sidelines, how does that strike you? Is it like more than already? Like how do you react to that?

DeSHONE KIZER: There's a million different ways of getting a point across, but as long as the point is getting across, then that's all that matters. Whether he's more animated or if he comes in a monotone point of view, as long as we're communicating the right thing and we're getting the message across and we figure out a way of improving upon the last drive before and learning what the defense is doing and what their game plan and properly reacting to that adjustment that the defense made, we're going to put up points. And however he decides to go about his communication on the sideline, as long as we're able to get the right message and it actively gets across to all 11 guys who are going out on the offensive side of the ball, then we'll be fine.

Q. Also in the run game he said like he wants to get away from you essentially having as many carries as you do down there, like just to take some hits off you, maybe no more spin moves, things like that. Does that have sort of a cumulating effect on you in the course of the game? Are you feeling that spin move shot to the kidneys in the fourth quarter that you've taken in the second quarter?

DeSHONE KIZER: I mean I shouldn't be spinning at all. I'm 6-5, 240 pounds. There's no reason for me to be out there trying to be C. J. Sanders with the ball in my hand. But with that, game plan's a game plan. When you have a quarterback who's able to carry the ball, defensive coordinators have to adjust to it and you add an extra hat to block. When the time is needed, I know that they're going to call the quarterback-driven runs that we need to. If the defense allows us to step away from me carrying the ball a couple extra times a game, then I'm sure we won't have to. At this point, like I said, it's all about just doing whatever it takes to get a win, and I'm going to go out and try to execute whatever they call. So if it is me carrying the ball 30 times a game, hey, give it to me; let's go. I'll be a running back if I have to. If it requires me changing my role on the opposite side, whatever it is they choose is what I'm going to have to do. Coach Kelly, if he says that we're going to take the ball out of my hands, rush a little more, then that means there's probably going to be a couple more passes that I'm going to have to execute. So as long as I'm executing whatever they call from the sideline I trust that we're going to go out and get wins.

Q. I ask that only in a sense like when you're taking hits, does that affect you as a passer later?

DeSHONE KIZER: No. Not at all. Not at all. And that's what we spent all off season doing is getting our bodies together to take those hits. It does add a little more stress to the beginning of the week when you're trying to get yourself back to normal. You take a couple more bumps and bruises, but that's a part of the game.

Q. So Kelly obviously has said multiple times this week that everybody's job is basically on the line, but then you kind of characterized practice yesterday as being a blast. So when he says that everybody's job is on the line, how is everybody able to kind of play more free and easy when you kind of have that in the back of your mind?

DeSHONE KIZER: Because that's sport. That's competition. That's part of it. What's fun is the fact that we do have to go out and compete. What's fun is that there is an opportunity for us to go out and take everything that we've ever done and all the experiences that we have in the past and put them to show each day at practice. I mean at my position, I mean it's obvious. We have three of the best quarterbacks in the country in my meeting room. And what's the best part about it is that I get to go out and I get to compete against those guys. There's no walk in the park for me. Every day is a grind when you have Malik Zaire and Brandon Wimbush behind you. What we've learned is that that competition is where we have to find our good times. When we go out and we do one-on-ones and we take each rep and go against great defenders with our great athletes on the offense, you have to find the enjoyment of competing, and that's what we did yesterday and we will continue to do. There's a ^ culture change that quickly happened this week, and I truly believe that we're going to buy into that and have that kind of push us onward to get some wins on the board.

Q. With Malik's situation, Coach Kelly said it was still kind of evolving. Can you kind of speak to what you've seen out of him the past couple of weeks? I know he had that new role on Saturday, what his role is now?

DeSHONE KIZER: I think that from week to week we game plan to get our best athletes on the field, and last week that was the best way to get our best athletes on the field was to give Malik a couple carries. I think Malik's position right now is as a senior on the Notre Dame football team is to help lead and help compete as much as he can. I can't speak to how he's going about it or how he feels his role is, but for me he's pushing me every day. His energy is something that challenges my energy. He's given me kind of an example of how I need to go out and how I need to approach some of the younger guys on the team. He's been through football at Notre Dame an extra year than I have and he's seen more than I have. And through his experiences he's able to come out and challenge me and challenge the team to get out of this rocky start.

Q. In fall camp when you won the job, you told us that your confidence was soaring at that point. I'm just wondering at this point is your confidence and your belief in that same place that it was then?

DeSHONE KIZER: Absolutely. Absolutely. I'm throwing the ball well. I'm seeing defenses well. I'm trusting my guys. On the offensive side of the ball we have some really good stuff up and going, and we haven't come near where we can go, and that potential is what's fueling us to go out and compete and to get better each week. And to go out and put up five to six touchdowns a game knowing that you can go and put up four more is what allows us to go into practice Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday to do whatever we can to figure out how we're going to execute more this quarter every time we touch the ball. We don't want to punt the ball. We know we have the ability to score every drive, and we have the confidence that we are going to. So that's why you see so much defeat on our faces when we drive down for five, six plays and we don't end up with points on the board because we know with the guys we have, with the coaching staff we have and the game plan we've put together that we should score every drive. So now our goal is to kind of lift that weight off of us, have some fun, execute the play that's being called, and we're going to see hopefully a couple more touchdowns a game, and we're going to see guys who are out there truly loving one another and a family style mindset on the offensive side of the ball and get us some more points and win some games.

Q. You were talking earlier about taking too much on. What were you trying to do? Was it mentally something you were doing or physically you were trying to do too much?

DeSHONE KIZER: Yeah, at the quarterback position you naturally take on an extra dose of leadership, an extra dose of trying to take on everything that a coach should be taking on. You go and you idolize guys like Peyton Manning and Tom Brady and all the best who have ever done it and you see how they approach the media, you see how they approach the game, you see how they approach their team. And they're professionals. They get paid to do that. They're in completely different positions than I am. And therefore, they take on a little more responsibility than I do. But me being the kid that I am, I wanted to be like them. I wanted to come up here and talk to you guys as if I was the head coach of this team. But I'm just the quarterback. All I gotta do is go out and do whatever the guys upstairs are telling me to do and that's it. If Coach Kelly asked me to come do media, I do media. If Coach Kelly asks me to go throw a touchdown, I need to go out there and rip the ball and throw a touchdown. I don't need to do any more than that and I think that was my biggest flaw in the beginning of the season is taking on too much. I just need to go out and play and have fun, challenge myself each day and just try to get better. Right now all I have is today's practice. If I can just focus in on how I can get better in today's practice, then I'll be a better quarterback tomorrow and hopefully being a better quarterback tomorrow will lead me into winning a game Saturday.

Q. What do you think you have to do better immediately?

DeSHONE KIZER: My attitude. I need to have fun. I need to play loose. I need to play free. Everyone goes back to that touchdown against Virginia, that smile on my face, me going down and cheering on my teammates. Those are the best times of my life and I need to get back to those moments, and to do that I need to focus my attitude on how can I get better today so we can score more touchdowns, win more games so I can have some more fun with my brothers.

Q. Last year you guys came up with those huge plays at the end. You've been scoring a lot of points, but at the end of the game you haven't been making those plays. What have been the biggest obstacles to coming up with those big plays at the end of the game?

DeSHONE KIZER: Overthinking some games. We get into those two-minute situations, and you try to imagine those times when we were successful last season. And they get to the back of your mind and you're ready to roll with it, and then all of a sudden they throw a new look at you and you start overthinking some things. You lose your mechanics. You might rush some things. And you gotta shy away from that. And my biggest issue in those two-minute situations is that we're behind the chains too early. We're behind the chains before we even get to the 50 yard line because I'm missing throws on first and second downs. When you're in two-minute drills, it's all about just getting the next first down so we can keep pushing, getting the clock stopped and getting near the touchdown so we can score. When you come out and you miss a field pitch throw that would put you at second and two and now you're going out at third and ten and trying to make something happen at the end of the drive, you gotta shy away from those moments, and to do that I gotta focus in on my fundamentals, trust in what I see and rip the ball.

James Onwualu

Q. James before Sunday how many camera stations have you had with Greg Hudson? How well do you know him?

JAMES ONWUALU: He was upstairs doing a lot of the work with the coaches, but he's been around. I've seen him around mainly off the training table. He's been a fun guy to have around. As a player you don't really know his exact role when you have a couple of guys doing upstairs office work. But he's still a guy that's been engaged and talking to all the players, and I think pretty much every player knew who he was even though he wasn't out on the field coaching us every single day. So I've had fun and jokes with him already before he became my coach.

Q. What was he like in practice, him getting his hands on you guys a little bit?

JAMES ONWUALU: Yeah. He brings that at that same energy as he would eating dinner to the field. He's always using different examples, different stories, a little bit of humor in his coaching. And an energy, there hasn't been a day he's been here that I've really seen him just walking around monotone. He's always got some energy and something to say. So brought that same thing to practice yesterday.

Q. At this point for you guys is that more important than like he has a great play call here on third down, just that energy aspect of it?

JAMES ONWUALU: Yeah. I think that's a great aspect of it, just having somebody that adds to the energy of the defense is something that I think he definitely brings.

Q. What was your reaction when you found out that Brian VanGorder had been fired? Was that shocking to you? How did you sort of process that?

JAMES ONWUALU: Yeah. You know, obviously everybody was talking about it. Even our student section seemed to have a strong stance on that. It was shocking to me. Obviously this is the only defensive experience I've ever had. He's really all I knew defensively. So it's difficult for some older guys, you know, and me included to put that aside and just take the next step into something new. All continue my relationship with Coach VanGorder and possibly still learn things from him, but I'm on to the next step and excited for coach Hudson to get us rolling.

Q. James, Coach Kelly said yesterday that he's sure that there are varying degrees of reaction among the defensive players. I mean were you one of the guys that was closest to him and it impacted you as much as anyone?

JAMES ONWUALU: Yeah. I think, you know, everybody had their different relationship with him, you know. And that's going to happen with any coach. I think that especially since I was new to defense, that I really tried to dedicate a lot of my time to sitting down with the head man and trying to learn straight from him. Some of those meetings and those sitdowns with him, even explaining a little bit about myself, you know, we got to know each other a little bit along the way. That helps with that off the field relationship. So yeah, I would say I was maybe one of the closer guys.

Q. Not that we had a ton of opportunities to speak with him, but when speaking with him, he almost always spoke very highly of you. What was your impression as to what he liked about you?

JAMES ONWUALU: He was a guy that had high expectations for everybody and expected people to do their job every single snap. So I think that's one thing that he respected from me, that I took this game and this team very seriously. If I were to miss up even in practice, I feel that weight, and I think that he could see that. And I just always felt as if everything I do reflects on my teammates, and he stood by that.

Q. I'm sure you had a conversation with him. It's personal. I'm not trying to get into all of that, but if you could just generalize what your -- it sounds like you're going to stay in contact with him. But I mean what that initial contact after the news was like?

JAMES ONWUALU: For me it was just, you know, thanks for the opportunity, because without him -- he was really the one that gave me the opportunity and spent the time and invested in me to be able to play defense and to be able to be where I'm at today. So just a quick thanks for the opportunity and the time that you spent with me. I don't think it's a huge good-bye. It's like anybody you work with; right? It's a business, you know. Stay in contact and I hope your next step is a good one, you know.

Q. Is there a sense of guilt or responsibility among the players? I mean obviously the coach gets fired and the next thing everyone is going to look at is will the team play up to your capabilities or obviously the players must be doing something wrong. Obviously there's a sense of urgency when you're 1 and 3, but is that driven home even more now that there have been changes made?

JAMES ONWUALU: Yeah, a little bit. As a unit, like I always say, the coaches are in it with us. They have a player role in that. So obviously he's going to be the first to go. But yeah, I think the whole defense knows that we need to play better ball, and obviously if we were playing better ball, that maybe not would have happened, but that's all in the past now, so just focusing on the players and what we can do from here.

Q. How do you, Isaac, Cole, some of the senior leaders on that side of the ball try to drive that point home to the younger guys that obviously it's a serious matter now, there's no more joking around?

JAMES ONWUALU: Yeah. I think a couple minor changes in the locker room, in the film room and obviously we've made some changes on the field and schematically. So I think that gives some of these younger guys a pretty good idea. When they don't see the same guy in there coaching them, they've got an idea of what's going on.

Q. Coach Kelly mentioned like streamlining the defense. He didn't necessarily say like it was going to be simplified. But what does streamlining mean and what has that meant this week so far?

JAMES ONWUALU: Obviously not going to go too into the schematics of our defense, but obviously there's some changes that the coaches have made, trying to put players in the best position to make plays. And making changes from what wasn't working before.

Q. I think he mentioned the streamlining part also could get a guy like Asmar into a game or some of the younger guys. Have you seen them kind of take to maybe getting an increased role a little bit so far in practice this week?

JAMES ONWUALU: Yeah. It's been talked about, you know, their reps have been increased. So I think it's definitely likely for those guys to get a little bit more PT in the game. So yeah, I think that a couple minor changes in the defense can help with that.

Q. Do some younger players still need to understand that how you prepare during the week affects -- it's not just about how you play on Saturday. It's how you prepare during the week and Mike's response was like prepare like a champion almost. Do you kind of sense that you need to drive that point home with some of the younger guys going forward?

JAMES ONWUALU: Yeah. We've always tried to prepare to the best of our ability. We practice hard. I think it's just the fact that we need to start practicing a little bit smarter, and the coaches have made a couple of changes, like I said, so practices are a little bit different. Still practicing with great intensity and continuing to push these younger guys to focus in on their job.

Q. Practice smarter, like focus on the right things? What do you mean by that, practice smarter?

JAMES ONWUALU: I think that it includes reps. It includes fundamentals. It includes conceptual periods. So really focusing on things like that I think would be the aspect of practicing smarter.

Q. Prior to this, did you notice a lack of passion in preparations? I'm sure it's going to be somewhat different week to week because human nature is different week to week, but did you ever notice that or is this something that you've kind of been made aware of now?

JAMES ONWUALU: No. I think at least our one defense has practiced hard all year long, and the intensity in practice is pretty serious and has been the same as previous years.

Q. Is it something where it's almost gotta trickle down more?

JAMES ONWUALU: I think trickle down, exactly, making sure that some of the younger guys are practicing just as hard as I am. It's huge.

Q. Obviously it's kind of a fresh start when you have a new coach. Do you feel like there's been any difference, rejuvenation or different attitude or different energy this week? Have you noticed anything different from your guys in that sense?

JAMES ONWUALU: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I think that also giving some of the 2s and 3s serious reps engages everybody; right? So we have a whole sideline that's engaged with what's going on in practice, and that changes the mentality and the excitement a little bit.

Q. It sounds like Coach Kelly is getting more involved this week with the defense. In what ways have you seen him be more involved?

JAMES ONWUALU: Even being over on the defensive field. He wasn't over there much unless we were going against the offense. And having him around has helped a ton. Having the head man around when you're doing your drills and doing 9 and 7 in a team, whatever it is, brings a little bit extra intensity to whatever you're practicing. So having him around and coaching us up and being involved in what our game plan is, I think has helped bring a sense of urgency to a lot of the guys on the defense.

Q. Coach Kelly talked about how one of the things he's going to try to do is get more guys in the rotation. He thinks fatigue may have played a factor in some of the missed tackles, some of the performance. Is that something you see and recognize?

JAMES ONWUALU: Yeah. I think it can play a role. We're all in pretty good shape, but when you're playing 100 snaps, 70, 80 snaps, whatever it is, by your 70th or 80th snap you're obviously not going to be as fresh as you were in the beginning of the game. So if you can get a series off or two even, that makes your 70th and 80th rep much more valuable.

Q. And also you talked about energy and having fun out there again. Is that something that can through how you play as well, how you perform and if so, in what way?

JAMES ONWUALU: Yeah. I think it can play something. If you can't get excited to go out and play for the University of Notre Dame, then we've got a problem. But just making sure that guys are practicing like that all week I think is more of the emphasis.

Q. Syracuse is an up-tempo opponent just like Texas was. Are there any differences in how you see they run their offense?

JAMES ONWUALU: Not much of a difference. A little bit different back field style, and the receivers have some pretty good speed. So them pressing the field and stretching the field is going to be huge in their schematic, in what they're trying to do.

Mike McGlinchey

Q. What is your reaction or how do you feel when Brian Kelly says that everyone's job is on the line?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: We are a one and three football team, and things need to change, and if that is Coach Kelly's way or method of changing the things that are going on in our program, then that's what's going to happen. He's the head football coach. We understand as a team that things haven't gone our way and that there's a lot of change needed within our program. And if guys are willing to respond to that kind of message, then that's what's going to happen. I mean obviously there's no sugar coating it of how bad some of the outcomes have been in the last couple of weeks, and change needs to be made, and whether it's a change in an attitude or response to that kind of a message, then if that's what our team needs, then we're all behind our head coach.

Q. Have you seen a difference in your teammates this week, anymore fire or change in attitude?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: I think so. I think there's an attitude that guys are just fed up, that we've had enough. We've had enough losing. We've had enough not playing to the potential that we are capable of and the standard that we have set here. And we went out to practice yesterday and guys were flying around, having fun with it, and I think that's the thing that we lost. We lost a little bit of that fun mentality, a little bit of that football genuine care about the game, and I think that we kind of got back to that a little bit yesterday. And that's been the message that we've been preaching for the last few days now.

Q. Kelly also talked about how DeShone has not been living up to expectations. What have you seen from him this week as far as dealing with obviously what Kelly has said about him and maybe how he's moving forward?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: I think DeShone has had incredibly high expectations put on him, both by himself and by a lot of other people around our program and outside of our program. And he has done a pretty good job of weathering that storm and kind of putting things away that don't need to be brought up. And there's some times where he's made mistakes in a football game, but I mean that's part of football. I definitely can't say I haven't made a mistake yet this year on Saturday. So DeShone is doing a phenomenal job and has done a phenomenal job both last year and this year and we are all 100 percent behind him and he knows what's expected of him and he's going to get the job done because that's who he is.

Q. Coach Kelly said there was a team meeting on Monday that he felt afterwards that you guys now have a clear understanding of the direction that the team needs to go. Why is it that after that the team now has a clear understanding of where it needs to go?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: We kind of laid it all out there, and obviously the things that were said are going to be kept within the team. But there's things that were said that kind of struck home with some guys. And we're all ready to kind of get that attitude back and get that -- and ready to change everything that's been going on. We've put ourselves in a pretty bad situation and it's time to wake up and fight back and rewrite the story of this season, and that's what we fully intend to do.

Q. Talking about DeShone and the high standard and everything, what about his mentality allows him to strive for that high of a standard that Coach Kelly and everyone sets?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: I think he realizes what he's capable of as a football player. I mean DeShone is one of the best, if not the best quarterback in the country, and he realizes that. Everybody on our team realizes that, and it's about the way he comes to work every day that allows him to be that guy. And it's not like he just a magic wand was waved over him to give him these special talents and powers, no, he works for it and he always has worked for it. It's the kind of guy that he is. He's an unbelievable worker, an unbelievable teammate. And that's how he comes to work every day with the mindset to be the best and that's the mindset that our team needs to kind of adopt as a whole.

Q. You're on the offensive side of the ball, but when Coach VanGorder was let go on Sunday, what was sort of your guys' reaction to it?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: Well, the reaction from us is that football is the way it is and Coach Kelly felt that there needed to be a change, and so we made it. And obviously it's tough when it's a mid-season change and guys are connected to Coach VanGorder and have a guy on our team that is his son. But at the same time everybody understands that changes needed to be made, and that's the decision that Coach Kelly made. So we all are behind it.

Q. With the change needing to be made when Coach Kelly comes out and says everyone's job is on the line basically and then someone's job is put on the line the day after, does that drive the point home for you guys even more? Did you need that point to be driven home even more?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: I don't really know if we looked at it that way. I think that the point has been driven home about what needs to change and how guys need to approach their business and how we all need to approach our business. Obviously that kind of did put some heat on it, I guess. But like I said, it's football. There's a business aspect to this, and we all need to get our jobs done. And if not, Coach Kelly is going to find a way to make somebody else do it.

Q. I'm curious, as a captain, this is a unique situation for you since you've been here, the message from Coach Kelly is, even in 2014 when there was a bad November, it wasn't until the middle of that month you guys were out of contention really. How do you change -- do you feel you have to change your approach as a leader when you're one of the three? Do you really have to go day by day right now at this point or can there be a long-standing message?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: No, absolutely. I think no matter whether you're in contention or not, the approach should be day by day. I think that's probably a little bit of what got us off the wrong track is not doing day by day. Guys were too worried about different things that they shouldn't have been worried about, and it has a



huge part of what you do focusing on one specific play, one specific day of practice and not looking forward to Saturday when it's Tuesday afternoon and you're in the middle

of a 24-period practice. It's not conducive to becoming a better football player and a football team. So I think the exact approach that needs to be done is a day-by-day approach no matter whether you're 1 and 3 or 4 and 0. So that's what we try to do each and every day, especially up front on the offensive line is kind of go back to basics and understand that football is an entire process. It's not just show upon Saturday and play ball. It's a game of intense, intense preparation. And we have to go back to basics on how to do that and continue with that mindset, and I think we'll be better off for it.

Q. You gotta go back a week in your mind, but did you notice a lack of passion preparing for Duke anywhere and is it hard to address that outside of your offensive line? Is that difficult to kind of address in that situation through a team?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: Regardless of whether it's on the offensive line or not, I would address it regardless because I'm a member of this football team, and just as anybody else is, they should address it as well if they feel that way. And obviously it is addressed, but whether you address it or not, it doesn't always kind of resonate, and sometimes things go the way they are and guys need a little extra wake-up call. And unfortunately we didn't get enough of that prior to the clock hitting zero against Duke and we need to do better, and it's going to be okay. We're going to figure out how to get that energy back, and I feel like it's already on its way back, but we gotta make sure we keep building each day, and I think it goes back to the day-by-day mentality and taking that kind of urgency to work each and every day and each and every snap at practice.

Q. Mike, as a veteran, I'm curious, do younger guys get like when you lose on Saturday, it may be because you didn't work hard enough on Tuesday or didn't get enough sleep on Wednesday? They just think it's, I didn't play well on Saturday, that's just how it is. Like do young guys get that?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: I don't think that you can ever fully get that because you always kind of feel like you're doing your part, but when you have to look in the mirror and it comes down to it, you wake up pretty fast when you're 1 and 3. We realize that what we felt, like what we have felt that good preparation is hasn't been good enough, and we will continue to ramp that up and continue to fight for the best play that we can. And it's about getting that understanding throughout the entire football team, whether you're a freshman or a fifth-year senior, that preparation is the most important thing in this game, and games aren't won on Saturdays in September. They're won in January in the weight room or in the summer doing your drills. And then each week it's won Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday when you're on the practice field. So if you can prepare the right way, prepare harder with the guys that we have on our team, I'm pretty confident that we can get our jobs done a little bit better.

Q. One thing that Josh Adams said after the game that I thought was interesting. He felt like sometimes at practice guys just go out to work like almost spinning their wheels a little bit as opposed to like being intentional about each drill and each rep. Is that something you feel like you guys need to get better at?

MIKE McGLINCHEY: Absolutely. It's a mindset, like everything else. You have to put everything that you can into each drill, each snap, each everything in this game. You can't overlook any detail. You can't leave any stone left unturned. It's so important that you prepare as a champion just as much as you want to play like one. And maybe that should be our new mantra, but it's coming down to that intensity about the littlest things possible, and Josh was right. I think there was a lack of that, but I think we're young, and I think that guys have to get that understanding through experience, and if that experience comes through hard times like we're in now, then so be it. But we gotta keep moving forward, and there's still a lot of football left to be played.

C.J. Sanders

Q. You guys are kind of a young wide receiver core. Couple issues with fumbles the last couple of games. Is there a couple of things you guys can point to as to why you've lost the ball a couple of times lately?

C. J. SANDERS: The biggest thing is concentration. You have to follow through with the catch, look at all the wind and things like that. We made those mistakes and we fixed them. It's over with. It's on to the next play. We feel after we did that, we know what we have to work on as far as the catch and tuck. But it's over now.

Q. Is that a transition you have to make from high school where you can probably make miss and now in college where two guys get to you and you have to get down?

C. J. SANDERS: That's a big change. At this level everybody is bigger and faster. So you have to kind of have that notion in the back of your head, okay, you know if there's three guys in the area and I don't know where to go, get down. We made that mistake which we learned from it, so now we know.

Q. Coach Kelly talked about DeShone having really high standards. Not meeting those for Duke. How do you view kind of how DeShone has played so far this year?

C. J. SANDERS: I think he's played well. He's a great leader. He's a guy who demands your attention and he demands greatness from each and every one of us. The biggest thing now is just for us to be more reliable. I felt like we made plays in spurts, but we just have to be more consistent. The guys in our receiver room are capable of making plays. Doesn't matter if it's a young guy like K. J. Stepherson or Chase Claypool. He knows we gotta make the plays, just gotta make them with consistency and just do well.

Q. How have you particularly practiced everything that's gone on in the last -- say the last five weeks of this season and especially in the last couple of days?

C. J. SANDERS: Yeah. I just see it as a little bit of adversity. It's just how you respond to it. The guys in this room are high-character guys. You can't even question that. So the biggest thing from here is just to see how guys respond, see if they're still going to go with their work in a positive way. And I think we responded well. We're just going to keep on grinding, keep on doing what we can control, and I think in the end we'll rebound, because like I said, in this room we have guys in here who are high character and who are going to fight till the end for each other as a group. So I think it'll be good.

Q. How hard is it to have that tunnel vision you have to have? Some of the guys talked last week about not looking beyond the next game, play, that sort of thing, rather than being attempted to look at the big picture?

C. J. SANDERS: You're right. It's tough to kind of have that tunnel vision, but the biggest thing is just being in this room together is just family. Not looking beyond the bigger picture, just looking beyond how can I help my brother, how can I put everything on the line for the guy next to me. So we know we just keep that focus in-house and on each other and the rest will follow.

Q. How do you feel when Kelly says that pretty much everybody's job is on the line?

C. J. SANDERS: Just try to have tunnel vision. The biggest thing is just family, like I said in the previous question, kind of putting everything aside, you know, from you and putting everything on the line for your brother. So no matter who's in the game, if DeShone's carrying the ball or Josh, I know I have to put everything on the line for them. If Corey is in the game at slot, I'm going to be supportive of him and hoping that he makes plays. So it's just that family core value of just being there for each other.

Q. And when you just said that DeShone demands your attention, can you give examples of how exactly he demands his teammates' attention?

C. J. SANDERS: When it comes to detail in practice. Whether you're on your blocking assignment or if you're routing a certain way he kind of demands your attention, hey, we need everything perfect. And I like that out of him. So we just gotta keep on striving to be great. I like that he's pushing us in that area and I think it'll pay off.

Q. And Kelly also said I guess Monday there was some meetings and he feels really confident that you guys have a clear understanding that the direction that the team needs to take moving forward. Was there more fire in the room? Did the players show -- I mean I guess like a different attitude already or how do you feel -- how do you think that -- why does Kelly think that there is a clear understanding I guess moving forward?

C. J. SANDERS: I'm not going to say too much because this stays kind of in-house, but the biggest thing is just putting everything on the line for your brother. I know I said that in the last two questions but that's really what it comes down to. You know, there's so much noise in the media and things like that, but we really have to just focus on each other. And we know that if that aspect is in play, and which we will do, then everything else will pay off in the long run.