

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

Saturday, December 5, 2020

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Coach Brian Kelly

Press Conference



Notre Dame 45, Syracuse 21

BRIAN KELLY: I'd like to start with how we got here. We wouldn't have gotten here without the vision that Father John Jenkins had for opening up our university. I want to start with thanking him for giving us this opportunity to play. Provost Miranda, coming up with a great academic plan for our guys to be able to play football, and if we didn't have academics, we wouldn't be playing football. Our executive VP, Shannon Cullinan, put together a Houdini of a financial plan to make this work. This was an extremely expensive plan in so many ways. My boss, our vice president, athletic director Jack Swarbrick, who was there daily supporting us and giving us all the resources necessary to compete during this very difficult time. Our VP for campus safety, Mike Seamon, who implemented a comprehensive safety plan and testing, and as equally important, Dr. Matt Leiszler, who oversaw the daily testing. And then Rob Hunt, who heads up our training, the care and custody, our athletic trainer Rob Hunt has the incredible task of following this virus daily with our student-athletes and the care and custody that he showed during this time was amazing.

Our support staff that wears many hats, just in here today, not only do they handle social media but they serve breakfast to us on the road, a support staff that's just so committed to seeing our football team succeed this year.

To my coaches that had to deal with starts and stops and a flexible mindset to do that, and 4:00 a.m. texts as to whether what the roster looks like each and every day. And then finally, incredible players that have had to commit themselves and sacrifice all year to be here and then have an undefeated season. So I'm so proud of them. Blessed to be their head football coach and was so happy for them to go undefeated this year.

All those people that made it happen, we wouldn't be here without them.

With that, I'll open it up to questions.

Q. I know you're going to get bombarded with Ian Book so I'm going to ask you a couple other questions. Tommy Kraemer came in awfully early. How do you feel like he played? How do you feel like Josh Lugg played, and then the second thing is you were talking about all the logistical things you went through. Can you speak to the ACC, its role in letting you have this kind of season and the way your program was able to take advantage of that.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, first of all, Tommy Kraemer. As we went along during the week, Tommy had made it clear that in his last home game, he wanted to play. And once he was cleared by our doctors, we saw that there was no need not to get him in the game.

And then with the weather situation, it was a little cold, I didn't want to keep him out very long, so I asked Jeff to get him in after the second series. So we got him in. I didn't want him standing around the sideline too long. He got in, felt really good. Jeff liked his production in there.

But we wanted to keep both him and Gibbons in the game and continue to build that depth.

Josh Lugg did well. He developed a big welt on his hand and he tried to work through it. He didn't bring it up to us until after the bad snap, and it really wasn't a bad snap to be quite frank with you. It just was a little bit different than what Ian had been getting. It really came up and rolled up on his wrist a little bit more, and he couldn't handle the snap. Thought he played solid in there, and I'll have to watch the film. We'll evaluate the film tomorrow and have a better detailed understanding of what we did up front.

As you know, the longer we stuck with it in terms of our offensive running production, the better we were.

As it relates to the ACC, we're obviously extremely grateful for Commissioner Swofford and giving us this opportunity, and then it's like anything else, take advantage of the opportunity, and we've taken full advantage of the opportunity, have played the 10 games that we have in front of us, and now we're playing for an ACC Championship.

Have been really impressed with the procedures and protocols that the ACC has put in place during this COVID



time, and excited to go to Charlotte and play for an ACC Championship.

Q. You guys have now gone undefeated in the regular season for two out of the three last year and this senior class hasn't lost a home game since they were young freshmen. How gratifying is it for you to allow them to go out this way and to know that you still have really exciting things in front of you the rest of this year?

BRIAN KELLY: Oh, it's extremely gratifying to go and finish the season the way we did. You know, to win the game is -- for me, the individual things for me, that doesn't come into the conversation or my thought process. It's about finishing for our seniors, a win at home, getting Ian Book into the record books as the winningest quarterback in the history of Notre Dame, solidifying our position in the College Football Playoff picture. Those are the most important things.

You know, this group is built different. The consistency that they have shown over the last three years is amazing. I mean, to win 24 consecutive games at home, that's hard to do. It's hard to do 24 things consecutively in anything. I mean, I have a hard time doing anything twice in a row, so 24 is really an amazing feat by this group.

But the individual things that these guys have accomplished, we talked about Ian Book, Kyron Williams going for 1,000 yards, those are the things that are gratifying for me to see these guys hit those kinds of achievements.

Q. Could you talk a little bit about the play of Ian Book today, what you saw in his eyes before the game, what you saw during the game, and just what he does for your football team?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, he accounted for five touchdowns, so five times six, 30 points. If he could kick, we should work on trying to get him to be a kicker, too. Counting for five touchdowns, great leader, you know, he just continues to get better each and every week. He'll probably tell you it wasn't his "A" game. It was probably a game where he played good. He wants to play better. But that's the great part about him. He hasn't played his best game yet in his eyes, but he still accounted for five touchdowns and threw some great balls.

I mean, McKinley played really well for us, Kyron Williams obviously ran the ball, and I thought we started running the ball much better. They were extremely aggressive. We had to dig out some safeties and extra hats that were rotating down that were hard to get to early on. We were

able to fit them up a little bit later in the game and run the ball a little bit more effectively, but it allowed Ian some opportunities in the passing game earlier, and I thought he took advantage of it.

Q. When you look at Ian and Javon, two guys who were classmates with different recruiting profiles, different career arcs, what have you noticed between them working together and this their fifth year that's seemingly helped them bring out something in each other?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, I mean, I think the best way to describe that would be the last -- no, it was the next to last touchdown that Ian threw going down towards the scoreboard on the left side. We scanned the play from the sideline. They were in a man situation, and so we had a dual call. If they were in zone, we were going to run the ball. If they were in man, we were going to throw the fade to McKinley in the corner. McKinley went up, made a great catch and a touchdown, and as Ian came running back off the field, he says, I can't believe they pressed him and gave us that touchdown.

And I think we're at that stage now where Ian doesn't believe that if you press McKinley that anybody can defend him and that he's going to put the ball where it needs to be. That kind of recognition and belief and trust is where this offense has grown throughout this season, where that didn't exist for, what, four years? It now exists, and that's why this offense is so much better than it was earlier in the year.

Q. Another one on Ian specific to today, how much credit does he get for getting the offense on track late in the first half after things maybe weren't going your guys' way?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, he gets a lot of credit. I mean, our defense gets some credit, and I think -- look, we weren't executing very well. It was either a missed read or a missed block or a drop or -- it's just, we weren't executing at the level that we're capable of, and then all of a sudden we executed at the level that our standard has been set at, and so it was not just Ian, it was the other 10 guys on offense executing at the level that they're capable of.

But you know, invariably it ends in -- it starts and ends with the quarterback, for good or bad, and he's taken his share of the load on the negative end of it and now he's reaping the rewards on the positive. Yeah, he made some really good plays and some reads, but I think early on we weren't as effective because we simply weren't executing at the same level.

Q. Could you break down what your schedule will be here for the next couple weeks as you prepare for the ACC Championship game and then also your thoughts on Mike Collins, wrapping up his tenure as the PA announcer and being a fixture at Notre Dame Stadium over the years?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, our schedule will be Sunday. Normally they are off. That's their day off, so they will come into the training room. We'll have victory meal with them tomorrow afternoon. Monday we'll come in and we'll weight train and meet with them on a graded film from Syracuse, and then Tuesday they're off. Wednesday we'll bring them in and weight train again and then scouting report, walk-through for Clemson, so it will be very light on Wednesday. And then Thursday, Friday, Saturday we'll begin a three-day additional preparation for Clemson. Sunday off, Monday, we'll begin the game week preparation leading into the championship game.

Yeah, I mean, it's -- I got here in 2010 and Mike Collins was already a fixture here in terms of PA announcer. So I've kind of learned about Mike each year. I've got an easy name to pronounce, so he always pronounced my name pretty well, but I didn't know that this was kind of part of the whole legacy here. It's been fun to listen to him, and him being part of this history here at Notre Dame. We wish him the best in retirement, and the next up will be somebody, I'm sure, interesting and we'll have a new legacy to talk about.

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