

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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Coach Brian Kelly

Press Conference

BRIAN KELLY: Very productive spring culminating with the game itself. Good news, start with that. No injuries. Talked to Rob Hunt, our athletic trainer, and other than a mild hip pointer from Justin Walters and a slight hamstring with Brunelle, came out of it great.

So that's always in the back of your mind when you play a game. Look, we purposely split these teams up equally in trying to balance them, as you saw that today. It was a fairly balanced game because we wanted to not really leverage either team in any shape or form. We really wanted to put guys out there and force them to compete in some of the more difficult situations that they would be in.

They'll be supported by a veteran in the fall or scheme, and we wanted them out there in the most difficult circumstances. So today that's why you saw some sacks. That's why you saw maybe not as many points.

But it was all calculated, and we got exactly what we wanted out of it from that perspective. So we'll have a great evaluation. Allows us to move in the direction that we need to into the off-season. Good day all around.

Great way to finish up. Have some weight training for a week and then we'll be an optional, because they're in study days, they'll go home and come back on June 12th and we'll begin the process of the next stage in the development of that football team.

With that, we'll open up to questions.

Q. When you look at how Jack Coan and Andrew Pyne played, how do you evaluate their performance and what you saw from them?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think all of them have work to do, Buckner, Pyne, Coan, but there is takeaways, right? I don't think that anybody went into this game expecting one guy to dominate in this game. We knew there were things to work on because you don't have a full rotation of players that you want and our offensive line is split up, running backs are split up, receivers are split up.

So you're not putting your quarterbacks in the best situations. We want to see decision making, management of the game, how the quarterbacks handle themselves in the pocket, out of pocket, what kind of throws they're making, on platform throws, some of the things they need to work on.

So we tried to be -- and Tommy did a great job I thought of giving them all the varied throws that we put in so we can continue to help them grow and develop.

But all in all, I think all of them did a fine job of what we asked them to do in this format.

Q. Brian, can you comment on what you saw from the defense? Did anybody rise to the occasion a little bit more than what you had seen earlier in the spring? Second question is about Tyler Buckner. Not to get too ahead of things, but is there any way you would maybe consider him for a niche role?

BRIAN KELLY: Yes, so from a defensive standpoint we were -- we were not going to put our guys -- and I keep using this word and maybe I should define it a little bit better -- in leverage positions, meaning we weren't going to be scheming up our the offense in this game.

We were asking our guys to do some things they hadn't necessarily done in the spring, and I thought they did some really good things individually. We played some press on the outside, we got our safeties involved, and I think what was pretty clear is that we got depth on the defensive line.

We can rush the passer, and certainly we're going to play with some physicality. So I think all in all, I don't know that there is one particular guy I would point to, but this spring has my eyes on a defense that plays fast, physical, and some guys are going to stand out a little bit more in this style than maybe they had in the past.

And that's kind of what we were expecting. So today we may not have seen that just because of the way we decided to play today.

As it relates to Tyler, that's the growth process for him. Today he took a big step up. He was given an opportunity obviously by being live and I thought he took advantage of



it. He had some really good throws down the field.

You know, obviously the one to Lenzy, the deep ball, did a really nice job with it. But I think that there is always a chance -- we're never going to close the door on what can help our offense being a better offense. We're not going to say Tyler Buckner is a freshman and he can't play. Tyler Buckner, look, if he can help our football team we'll find any role for someone that can help us.

So just needs to continue to grow, learn, and if he does that and we feel like when we get to the fall there is a role or some form of playing that can help us with Tyler Buckner, we'll certainly consider that as well.

Whatever makes us better is what I'm saying we're certainly going to consider.

Q. You said earlier in the spring that the older receivers were the ones that were going to have to be the driving force at those positions. Force fed them the ball today. What is your assessment upon the conclusion as to where that frontline group is number one? We didn't see Michael Mayer today. Was he banged up or was it a choice to keep him out?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think they're all talented enough. As I told them, I think the next step in their progression to be where we need them to be as I've challenged them personally and what I need them to do for us is their attention to detail has to be better, the little details. I told Joe, Joe, you can't drop a hitch route on the perimeter.

It's first and ten. We're trying to get the chains in our favor. Now it's second and ten. We limit our playbook. Joe is trying to make a play. I get that.

But, Joe, you got to understand in those situations, you got to make that catch, get six or seven yards, get a second and three, and now we got a wide open playbook.

Lawrence Keys is running what we call our option route and he doesn't break out and we throw the ball inside, and he clearly had a read to break out. That attention to detail is the next level with these guys that we've got to get.

And they want do it. They're capable and we're going to stay the course. When they get there they will ascend to the level we need them to play at, but we're enjoying the process with them. They're 100% all in.

I thought they flashed today, but we've got some work to do with the details.

As it relates to Mike, Mike could have played today, wanted

to play today. That was my decision. He was probably about 80%. No sense of playing a guy that's not 100% in the spring game that we've already won.

So we kept him out.

Q. Could you assess what you've seen from your young offensive lineman through the spring more so than today. I know today they were hamstrung being split into two teams.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, you know, I mean, it's a question that we ask ourselves every day in their evaluation. You know, I think we're like everybody else. We're focused squarely on getting the best five together, and the way to do that is put them in tough situations.

Today was a tough situation. We could have made it a lot easier for Rocco and Blake and Dillan Gibbons snapping for the first time. We could have made it really easy, but that wouldn't have been the best thing for this football team moving forward. So assessing that critically would be today saying that we got work to do, but we're going to get there, and having days like today allow you to not fool ourselves into saying we're this finished product.

We got work to do. Today allows us to evaluate much more clearly about where we need to go to be a championship football team.

So as I sit here right now answering the question, and it's a good question, we ask it every day. As we watch this film, we'll continue to ask the question where does Jarrett Patterson play? Is he a tackle, guard, center? All those things yet to be determined as we put this offensive line together.

Q. I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit about the linebacker and the safety groups. Obviously like Kyle out so some other guys playing today. Then the linebackers, Marist and Jack, both leading the team in tackles and what you saw from those two groups.

BRIAN KELLY: I'm very, very pleased with the depth at the linebacker position as I mentioned maybe in the last Zoom call we had. Really pleased with the depth that's developing at the safety position.

Obviously that starts with Houston and really having a great spring. He was outstanding in all areas, off the field, on the field. And so when you feel like you got a veteran player like that along with Kyle Hamilton and DJ Brown who has played a lot of football for us, had a really good spring, we're still working on the fourth. Saw some flashes today.

I thought Lynch made some nice plays. K.J. still continues to get better for us out there. You saw Walters showing himself today. So we're still working on finding that next player.

But I'm pleased with the spring that we've had at the safety position and the depth that's developed with J.D. Bertran. And Drew White has been out all spring really. Protected him again today.

But JD and Drew and Shayne, and you mentioned Marist, Kiser, that's a pretty good rotation of players that Coach Freeman has got at his disposal.

Q. You been here for a dozen years; had off-seasons where you probably knew what you had before the first spring practice started, and then some off-seasons probably needed more development. Is this one of the more in-process off-seasons you've had where there is still a lot still to answer? And then my other question is following up on Buckner, whether it's a niche role or something more -- assuming Pyne and Coan are still going at it as well -- how do you make this work when you have three questions potentially unanswered at quarterback instead of two?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, so the way that I see things right now is that we're a good team, and good teams are not good enough. We want to be a great team. Good teams don't win a national championship. We need to be a great team. How do we get from good to great?

That's -- you know, that's where we are in this process. I can put enough -- we can put enough good players out there to have a good football team. Nobody around here is interested in good. We want to be great.

So getting that to go from good to great is the process that we're in, and that's what we're seeking in the off-season. So this isn't about, oh, my God, how are we going to get a football team together that's representative of the standards of Notre Dame.

Well, the standards are pretty high. We've been to the playoffs two out of the last three years, so we've got a pretty good football team. Not good enough right now, and we know the things we have to work on if we want to put ourselves back in contention.

As it related to Tyler Buckner, I will say this right now: He had a good spring game and he did some really good things, but it's going to take some time for him to continue to develop, and we'll put him in competitive situations.

As it relates to the quarterback position it is going to be scrutinized, and it should be. This is Notre Dame. Ian Book is the all-time winningest quarterback in the history of Notre Dame and he got scrutinized every week. So it's fair to scrutinize this position each and every week. We do that.

It's our job to put the best player out there. If it's Pyne, Buckner, Coan, that's what we need to do. So we have got to find a way to develop the quarterback at Notre Dame to be ready to play, and I don't know that all three can get equal reps in answering your question to see that that happens.

So something will have to give a long way as this continues to unfold when we go into camp.

Q. Follow up on Shayne Simons specifically. Made a nice play on the interception. Where has he made the most progression in his game? Without Michael Mayer, how much has your confidence raised in that group this spring?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, you know, Shayne is so assignment correct and he's been that way. There are times that we have feel like the awareness piece has been a lag from him a little bit, and he has picked up on the awareness.

Today was great awareness. He sees Kyren in the slot, he's seen that play before, and he immediately reacts to it. Those are the kind of growth things that you look for, and Shayne is showing that kind of growth at the position, the awareness of playing the position like a guy that I've seen this before.

And it's not his first time out there, and that's what we been waiting for. Starting to see that with Shayne. He's got all the physical tools, all the leadership, and the commitment that you want. Now that awareness has been a piece that has been coming, and to see that today was really big for us.

The tight ends, you know, all those young players that got a chance and George Takacs who is about 152 years old. Nice to see old man George out there today. George is an undervalued player on our roster. He can make plays and he's a talented player. Was nice to see him have some success.

I think he's going to have more success moving forward. Those young guys are all capable players that can certainly pitch in. George has had a good spring, and we expect him to be a contributor for us in the fall.

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