

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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Coach Brian Kelly

Press Conference



BRIAN KELLY: All right, start with great home atmosphere. Great to see the green, and just it felt like, you know, on the walk here the energy on campus, it felt like we were back to what a Notre Dame home football game feels like.

That energy kind of was felt by our players, and it is what you want at Notre Dame and what you look for in a home game environment.

So thanks to all those that came out and were just part of a great atmosphere there today. So, you know, I think it's important that we don't take this for granted. Many times you come to these games and you just think, Well, that's the way it is.

It's pretty special when you have the whole crowd into it, fourth down, big plays. So it was fun for our guys and they really enjoyed it.

As for the game itself, I like the way our guys prepared this week. I think I mentioned that. Our level of preparation rose this week, and certainly our performance did. It wasn't flawless by any means, but playing a Big10 opponent that has really good players and a couple of guys that are going to play on Sundays that are outstanding players. You know, we did some really good things defensively.

Did some really good things on offense. We developed some players today with the more snaps that they get they get a little bit more gritty and start to figure things out. That's what happens when you're transitioning.

Tosh Baker was thrown out there against one of the best pass rushers, and obviously they had some good plays but we had a lot of good plays as well.

You know, you've got Cam out there and he's playing first time and gets a couple calls go against him and keeps battling and makes a big play at the end. I just like the fact that we're growing, getting better, and we can come back now and look at the things that we obviously have to

continue to improve on.

With that, I'll let you guys fire away. And gals.

Q. You talked about the need to eliminate big plays on defense. You clearly did that today. How much does that impact what you guys were able to do?

BRIAN KELLY: Quite a bit. Quite a bit, right? You saw the structure of our defense today. We added some things in there that I think will be part of what we do.

I thought we executed better. You know, I thought we tackled better. Not great, but better. We still you have to continue to leverage the ball a little bit better.

This was an improvement, and there were going to be some growing pains and there were, but we did it through some wins. We've got an ACC win, a win against a really good MAC team, and we got a Big10 win as we continue to grow and develop.

Q. You hit the big plays on offense today.

BRIAN KELLY: We did, and we missed them obviously as well, right? I thought Avery Davis was outstanding. I will add that as a captain he lead by example during the week. His standard of preparation was what everybody needs to model after. I said that in the locker room tonight. His performance showed that.

So we got to get others to model that as well.

Q. I know you've been asked this a lot. You talked about it recently. Now that you hit the 105 win milestone, do you have any thoughts?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I mean, it takes a lot of things to be in place for that to happen. Father John has been with me on this journey, Jack has been on this journey. Consistency, leadership, alignment, all these things have to come together to get this point.

You can't -- look, we're going to play our rival and they've had a number of different head coaches at their university. You know, I'm talking about our rival on the west coast. This is not to smear them at all. I'm just saying it requires consistency to get to these marks.



We have it with our leadership, our athletic director, and we've had it in the coaching because we have alignment. And because of that, that's helped a lot in being consistent and winning football games.

Q. You didn't give any points the last 22 minutes after giving up some third down conversions. I think you're one for -- held them 1 for 11.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think that's what Katy said.

Q. How much of an emphasis was placed on the fourth quarter, which was a struggle defensively?

BRIAN KELLY: Tim, it wasn't necessarily the fourth quarter. It was more about we wanted to get guys in the game to keep them fresh. We felt like the play load was too high.

You know, you saw Brown in there a lot. You saw Ramone in there a lot, TaRiq. We were rotating guys in because we felt the player load was too heavy on guys and we were making some mental mistakes in the fourth quarter.

So I think that rotation helped us a lot, and we spent a lot of time on our third down packages and getting off the field.

Q. How confident are you with the backups that you put out there defensively? I know you want to play more players, but is that still a concern the deeper you go into the depth chart?

BRIAN KELLY: I think everybody has the same thing, Tim. Like we're playing guys with less experience, but we got to put them in these games to get experience. So the waters get choppy a little bit, but, look, they're not going to be better if you just keep them on the sideline; they have to play.

We had a situation which was a great teaching situation with a couple guys that they got better because we were able to teach because they were on the field.

So I'm not going to play scared. Look, I want to win every game we play, but we got to get these guys ready. I really think we got really good young players, and in time, it's going to be a really competitive football team.

But they got play.

Q. How close do you feel you are offensively? Did you make progress in any areas today?

BRIAN KELLY: Sure. I mean, I think, look, I mean, the

inability to catch a couple balls here and there is something that is wholly correctable, right? You know, if we felt like we were deficit in our ability to find a running game or get guys open, then I probably be here going, This is going to be a rough one, guys.

I feel pretty good. We just have to be executing at a little bit better level, and we got great teaching opportunities now this week.

Q. A game where I think Mayer, one catch, five yards, Kevin Austin targeted, but no catches. The fact that you were able to produce offensively, do you get some good teaching material out of that for other guys like Avery, and even Braden with the drop, but still you're trying to push it to him?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think, I mean, look we were able to get to the backs. I think the good thing is we have diversity on the offense relative to the way it's set up. If you're trying to take Mike away we can get the ball to other players. I thought we did. I thought Tommy did a great job of finding ways that brought a lot of pressure.

They really forced our hand early when we were doubling George. They brought the inside backers. So it was a chess match and I thought Tommy did a great job of figuring it out and finding where we could get some matchups.

So, yeah, there is enough guys to go around that we can still be a really good offense if you take a Mike Mayer away.

Q. What was the approach with Jack Coan and Tyler Buchner today, who to play when and why, and ultimately what were you looking for in terms of when you maybe wanted to try something new with Tyler?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, it was similar to what we did the first game, Pete. We got backed up again and he got us out of a bit of a hole, so he's kind of been that guy that we've kind of leaned on when we're backed up and maybe he gives us a boost, if you will.

Then he had a tight hamstring and couldn't go again. That's why you didn't see him again. So we wanted to be cautious with him. We don't think it's anything major, but we weren't going to put him out there, especially with a guy that's going to run, if he doesn't feel great. Not going to go out there and pull it and be out for two, three weeks.

Q. We ask you about identity offensively all the time. Kyren's touchdown run, can that be a chunk of that, just from an attitude standpoint?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, you saw. We had Joe Walt out there, No. 35. We're trying to really hone in on what we can do as we have been banged up a little bit on the offensive line, and really carve out an identity, and it's been shot passes. When we get those shot passes we got to convert.

And then, look, running the football is about when they know you're going to run it, you've got to be able to come up big, and we did that today.

Q. What can you say about the way Kyle Hamilton performed today and how important was it be able to match him up on David Bell at times?

BRIAN KELLY: There is only one guy that can make the plays he did today. You guys watched it. That fourth downplay, how good was that? That was pretty good, wasn't it?

Q. Yeah.

BRIAN KELLY: I thought it was, too and I was standing right there. I would pay to watch him play. You know, he just missed another one late. He's a really good player if you guys didn't know that.

I know you do. I say that. He does some things that surprise me at times, his awareness, tackling, and he had a really good week, too.

He's another guy that is a captain, has stepped up his preparation, and it showed today.

Q. Seemed like you guys did some more max protection with fewer routes on some plays today. What do you did think you were able to get out of that?

BRIAN KELLY: If we didn't do some of the things, George was going to wreck the day. He was going to wreck the day. That guy is good. He's really good.

I was not going to let him wreck the day for us. We had to do some things that from an offense it's not a beauty show. For me there is no pictures. We just want to find a way to score enough points. Today was one of those when you have an elite pass rusher like that.

Q. Lastly, Cam Hart, do you know what he was banged up with at the end?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, he landed on his hip, so likely being examined for hip pointer would be my rookie kind of medical observation there.

Q. (No microphone.)

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I mean, I been doing this a long time. Just to give a sense of it, we have -- I believe in using analytics, but I'll trump them if I don't feel like the game is going the right way.

There were a couple occasions where analytics said to go and I decided to punt and we downed one inside the one. It's art and science, and so I rely on it, but I'm not married to it.

I still think you got to get a feel and a flow for the game. We use the analytics, but I think there were a couple times today where I decided that it would be best to do something different.

Q. (No microphone.)

BRIAN KELLY: Well, we're still evolving as leaders, right? They definitely know our standards and what to do and how to do it. They need to articulate it a little bit better, and they're getting better at it.

That's my work, you know. That's what I do every day. I meet with our captains, spend time with them. Some guys are better at it than others. They all want to be great at it. So we're evolving there and getting better at it.

I love them all. Each one of them has their own strengths and weaknesses and traits that allowed them to be leaders, but some of are better at I would say letting the others that are falling below that line know about it.

Q. Coach, what do you feel like you got out of Tosh Baker today, and what do you think the potential long-term this season is for your offensive line?

BRIAN KELLY: I thought Tosh battled his butt off. You know, at the end of the day he had a couple of procedure penalties, but when you look in the kid's eye and you're on the sideline or you are at a timeout and he's got a look that he's just loving it, like I love being out here competing, I just love the fact that he got in there and battled and has some experience now that we can count on.

We just added some great depth to our football team. You know, look, I mean, our offensive line continues to grow and develop each and every week. You've got a third tackle with his first start. You've got a left guard that was trained as a center that is learning every day. You know you're good at center.

I think the right guard, Cain, is doing a good job, and I think



Lugg is playing his best football. So I would say all in all, they're playing pretty good.

Q. Last one from me. With your defense, the performance today, could you see it coming during the week? And also, with Jordan, I know he played special teams.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, he just wasn't physically -- when you're off for that period of time some guys respond better than others, and he just did not have any legs. Mike wanted to keep him on special teams and he was an emergency-use guy for us. We are pretty sure he'll be in a better spot for us next week.

As far as did we see it coming, there were lots of conversations about what do we need to do defensively to add to our portfolio relative to looks and things of that nature. I think we hit on some things that we really like that fit our guys and that they can execute at a high level, and so that's what you saw today.

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