

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

Saturday, October 30, 2021

South Bend, Indiana, USA



Dick Corbett Head Coach

Brian Kelly

Press Conference

Notre Dame 44, UNC 34

BRIAN KELLY: I'll start with really proud of our football team coming back after an emotional rivalry game in USC. Our guys didn't come out flat. They came out with great energy and really just -- you know, that was really the emphasis was come out with the same kind of standard of how we play.

Offensively did some really good things tonight. Good balance on offense and defense -- excuse me, offensive running the football and throwing it. It's an improving football team. We've got, I don't know, five Power Five wins. Is that right, Katie? Six. We've got six Power Five wins. It's an improving football team.

You know, I just like the position that we're in. We're getting better each and every week. That's a tough team to defend. I wouldn't call it our best night defensively. We've got to coach a little better in terms of communication and some things that happened out there. But Sam Howell, what a warrior he is.

I got a chance to talk to him after the game and just a class act. And we hit him a lot. And he laid it on the line. Here is a guy that's not talking about going to the NFL. He's talking about playing as hard as he can. And really, really enjoyed watching him play. He's pretty special. 341 yards throwing and another 117 rushing. Just pretty amazing performance.

Back to our team. The performance was as good as we've had offensively in terms of run pass. We opened up some things by getting the ball out on the perimeter. They were loading the box. And that really helped. Those were an extension of our run game, and it really helped open things up for us and give us the balance. I think the two quarterback situation worked out well again for us.

And we had a number of freshmen. Diggs stepped up. Styles stepped up. Obviously Alt, another true freshman

playing a lot for us. Colzie is in there obviously playing quite a bit for us. So it's nice to see all those young players get a lot of work.

So, again, I really like this team. I love their grit. But I also love the fact that they're getting better each week, and that's a really good thing. So with that, we'll open up to questions.

Q. Brian, the Kyren Williams' 91 yard touchdown run, what's the play? What's supposed to happen? Have you seen something better?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah. Heck with the play. I mean, it's about players over plays. We were running duo, double team on the play side. They ran a swarm to the front side. And he bounced it back and just made something out of nothing. That's going to be a zero -- you know, net zero gain, and he turns it into a -- what was it, 91 yard run. Just an incredible individual effort.

And we've got some really smart guys down field. Avery makes a smart decision not to make a block but get in the way of a defender. Mike Mayer, you know, rolls a guy down the field.

So great blocking down the field too.

Q. We've asked you this a ton of times, but just the attitude that Kyren injects into the rest of the team, do you see that every week?

BRIAN KELLY: Pervasive. No, it's pervasive. It's not only the offense, it's the defense. It's everybody that watches him play. But that's -- I'm not going to tell you that he stands in front of the room and talks to the team about leadership techniques. But his leadership by the way he does things puts him in a role as a captain. And you saw that tonight the way he handles things.

Q. Defensively, North Carolina put you in such conflict. Pick that apart. Where do they sort of get you schematically? And what's something tonight you come away with like we just have to be better at that?

BRIAN KELLY: I felt with -- if you have six drives of 75 yards, I don't know that they got us as much as we went to something else when they wanted to take it away. We had

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more answers than they had tonight in that respect.

We had not had those answers before. Spreading the formations, getting the ball out on the perimeter, you know, throwing the ball in the seams and then allowing that to set up runs were some of the answers that Tommy was finding while they were trying to take something away.

Q. (No microphone.)

BRIAN KELLY: Oh, I I took it as what they were doing --

Q. (No microphone.)

BRIAN KELLY: Well, you know, we took away all the RPOs. Right? So there were no RPOs. The one RPO they threw, we picked it off. But you're playing three down, and you better be absolutely correct on every gap fit or -- they ran a power, and we got pinned down, and we couldn't get over the top. They had a big play run.

We had a couple of miscommunications on some man coverage situations. That's got to get cleaned up. I think personally we have to coach it better and put our players in a better position. We're going to lean on ourselves as coaches to help our kids get in better positions.

Q. Are you more impressed by Kyren's touchdown run or Jack's?

BRIAN KELLY: No question, Jack Coan's. He is right now thinking that he touched 19 on the GPS. I'm calling liar on that. But he's feeling pretty good about himself right now.

Q. Was there something you guys did see with an element of surprise in terms of being able to run it with Jack because not many would expect that to happen?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah. So we were getting a lot of two deep zone and we were picking our spot. They're are a bracket coverage team in certain situations. And it was a tendency that we felt like we would get Jack the opportunity to pick up some first downs. We weren't looking for touchdowns or big plays. We were looking to move the chains.

Q. Brian, in terms of the playbook, is this the most expansive that it has been? It looks as if Tommy Rees has a whole bunch that he can call from?

BRIAN KELLY: He does. He does have a lot of answers going for him right now. I mean, we got over the top on a flat foot safety. We didn't make the catch. I can give you a lot of different examples of whether it's quarter coverage, man coverage, one-on-one situations, you load the box,

the ball's going out on the perimeter.

We have a lot of answers for us right now that are being executed. But we're doing it with two quarterbacks too because we need -- Buchner made some really good plays. The third down play where he holds the ball and flips it over the top to get it to Mayer. He's making some really good plays too. So the combination of the two quarterbacks really makes that an expansive playbook.

Q. The fifth straight opponent with two weeks to prepare. There's always -- I mean, you said it last week --

BRIAN KELLY: Exhausting.

Q. Yeah. I would imagine it is. What was it this week that was a different wrinkle from what you'd seen?

BRIAN KELLY: So, yeah, I mean, their offensive run schemes were -- they were a heavy counter team. I mean, anybody who watches North Carolina play, that's their number one play. They didn't run counter at all.

It was difficult to defend. And we struggled. And we have to be better. We've got to be able to handle offenses that show some things that are different and make the adjustments.

Q. You had some busts in the secondary.

BRIAN KELLY: Yes, we did.

Q. But all things considered with Kyle Hamilton out, how do you think the group held up?

BRIAN KELLY: They did pretty well. We got good play out of -- DJ played really well, Houston, and Pryor. All three of those guys working together I thought played well. I thought our communication was pretty good. It's got to get better. We get into some bunch alignments and some stack alignments. One guy's making a call, it's getting trumped. We've got to coach it better. Our kids should not be put in that position. We've got to do a better job.

Q. Brian, we talk about the tempo as just helping execution in making that easier. But with Jack in particular, I guess from beginning of the month to now, what does he look most or more comfortable or most improved I guess in?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, he's never played in this type of offense. Right? So this is new for him. So he's got a shiny new toy that he really likes. We've worked hard with his footwork. His footwork has been so much better.

The poor throw that he makes, he gets flatfoot, he puts the ball on the ground to Mike where he's wide open. He knows exactly what he needs to do to be accurate and to be on time. And a lot of it stems from the waist below.

He is such a smart kid. He is such a good quarterback from that position. He did not make one mistake in identifying the fronts and checks and things of that nature. They were blitzing the back. We had to cross-read the back in protections, and he was setting all that. He had a lot on his plate. But what he's seeing is that he can really ascend in the offense right now.

Q. It seems like what you described kind of looks a lot different than what we saw in the opener with down field and kind of leaning into the --

BRIAN KELLY: We were dumb. We were dumb. I mean, we -- look, we were trying to figure out what he could do. And we were using a lot of the skills that he had. But we have found obviously a niche where he feels really comfortable.

Q. To follow up on that, Brian --

BRIAN KELLY: Being dumb? Thanks, Doug.

Q. I was more going to say the success of that opening night, was that almost misleading for you as a coaching staff to think this worked out? I think it was 366 yards and four touchdowns that night?

BRIAN KELLY: The epiphany for us was the Virginia Tech game where we put him back in after he had not had a very good start to the game, and we get him in the two-minute again, and now he looks great. And now we're like, okay, we've got this figured out now. Let's shorten his drop. Let's get these feet moving quickly. Let's get him through his progressions. The ball comes out faster, quicker decisions.

I mean, look, I don't know that he threw -- we were talking about, he never throws we call it a bubble throw, the perimeter bubble -- he didn't throw those before. But he's accurate, and the ball comes out quickly. And you can see what happens when you get it into those skill guys' hands, they turn those into big plays.

Q. Question regarding Braden Lenzy.

BRIAN KELLY: He had -- he went into the concussion protocol. But, look, I'm not a medical doctor, but we talked about the Gettysburg Address, and he was able to recite it back to me so --

Q. Did he know it before the game?

BRIAN KELLY: No. Still not sure he knows what Gettysburg is.

Q. Brian, we saw Chris Tyree --

BRIAN KELLY: And I'm not trying to make light of it. He's feeling really good. He's feeling really good after practice. Obviously, our medical people -- I don't want to make light of a potentially serious situation. But he feels good. He'll go obviously be evaluated, but we're feeling like we had a good conversation.

Q. We saw Chris Tyree out there on kick return team. How close was he to maybe getting some snaps offensively?

BRIAN KELLY: He's getting really close. We thought that that was the entry level for him. I think this week we're really going to lean on him hard in practice. We wanted to get him back to a volume in practice that his conditioning level was where it is and where it needed to be. And I think we take the next step now going into Navy.

Q. You mentioned Lorenzo Styles earlier. He's probably one drop pass away from going well over 100 yards. Obviously, he made an impact still tonight. What is it about him in the last three or four weeks that has gotten him on the field and how much of an impact player can he be the rest of this regular season and going forward?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah. He's going to continue to impact. He's got a great demeanor. His work ethic is outstanding during the week. His volume is amazing. We can throw a lot of volume on him. And he's explosive. You can see him, right, when he touches the ball, he's explosive.

So he went in there when Braden went down and didn't miss a beat, was able to take all the reps out there. And, yeah, he's going to continue to impact us.

Q. Just kind of -- it's a much different week coming up obviously with Navy after North Carolina.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah.

Q. But what do you take from this and the efforts to make open field tackles? Sam Howell is much different than what you're going to see. But obviously that's the most important thing when you're facing this next opponent.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah. Look, we knew what the schedule was, back to back weeks with USC and UNC. They're two really good offenses to go against. And you can't take away everything from Howell. If they were going to beat us with quarterback draw, it would be the first time in my career that I would stand up on this podium and say they beat us running quarterback draw.

And I've got to tell you, we can't take everything away. We had the one letdown where the mistake in coverage. But by and large, we kept the ball in front of us and where we wanted to. We let up a big play run on a power play that we just -- we got to coach it better. But you can't take everything away from a guy like that.

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