

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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South Bend, Indiana, USA



Dick Corbett Head Coach

Brian Kelly

Press Conference

Notre Dame - 31, USC - 16

BRIAN KELLY: Great victory. You know, look, it's -- it means a lot. It's a rivalry game, but it's -- it's our rivalry game at Notre Dame.

(Loss of ZOOM connection.)

And considered a big rivalry. And certainly I understand why. But this is our game. And it means a lot. It means a lot to our kids, it means a lot to our university, everybody associated with it.

And, you know, to come out victorious, there was a lot of preparation. They were very difficult to defend, as you know. And we needed to see our offense mature, which I thought tonight was probably that first step that -- where we felt from the -- the start of the game to the end of the game, the offense began to come together in the -- the manner that we wanted it to.

We played faster. We put Jack in a position where the ball came out quick. We gave him quick definitive run/pass reads.

And it really seemed to give us the kind of offensive flow that we're looking for. I think he was 20 for 28. And then Kyren Williams ran with, you know -- pervasive throughout the entire offense.

So really proud of our football team. You know, Kyren was somebody to talk about. But, you know, from a definitive standpoint, you know, DJ Brown steps in for Kyle Hamilton, who goes down early, and does a really fine job for us. He did that last year against UNC, as well. So I think it's time we start recognizing, you know, really solid football players, like DJ has done for us.

And I was really impressed with Tariq Bracy's play. He played physical for the first time. And I mentioned him to our team.

He bullied some receivers out there today in getting off blocks. Came up with the big fumble and sack at the end of the game. He played the way I was hoping he would play when he came in as a freshman.

And so, it's great to see a player play his best football in his fourth season. So really proud of him tonight.

And then this was our best performance of five guys playing together on the offensive line. So I'll shut up and let you guys ask the questions.

Q. Brian, Kyren Williams certainly never lacks energy out there. But did he play with a little bit more edge tonight knowing that Chris wasn't going to be able to go for you guys?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I don't know if that had, Tyler, much to do with it other than this was an important came back for him, as well. And we -- you know, we knew that we were going to ride him. You know, we had Diggs available and C'Bo was available.

But, you know, you kind of sensed during the week that he was going to put this on his back. So I think he went into this game up knowing, you know, with Chris not available, that he was going to get the kind of carries that he was going to get a chance to influence the game, I guess.

Q. And the tempo upfront -- (loss of ZOOM connection -- sort of affect USC? I know, obviously, something that you feel that Jack is comfortable with, but do you believe that put the defense maybe a little bit off-balance, as well?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, well, certainly they weren't expecting, you know, Hurry-Up Jack to be up there. He's been less than that all year. So it still was about matching personnel for them.

And so, when we were in 12 and 13, you know, they were trying to match personnel, and Jack was still on the field and we were playing fast. So it was certainly something that they weren't prepared for.

But they were prepared to move personnel in and out of the game regardless. Because they wanted to match our



11 personnel with their nickel personnel.

Q. Kyle Hamilton's prognosis, what do you have?

BRIAN KELLY: Pinched fat pad on the knee. No structural damage. You know, prognosis is really good.

Q. And then Isaiah Pryor was playing a little bit of safety, I believe.

BRIAN KELLY: Yes.

Q. Is that something he was prepared for? Was that an emergency situation?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, we were in dime, so we were playing three safeties. So, you know, I don't think it's something that, you know, when we look at the depth chart, you won't see him on Monday as another safety. But in our dime package, he became the third safety.

Q. Brian, with Chris sidelined and Lorenzo taking the kickoff returns, he also got more involved in the offense, was that something that he just got momentum going because he knew going to be involved anyway on kickoffs, or was that something that came in the idle week?

BRIAN KELLY: No, it's been gradually coming. And, you know, we felt like he's a guy that has earned his opportunities. When he's in there, he's made plays for us.

So, yeah, I just think it's been the natural evolution of his opportunities coming to him and making plays. He's got a burst. He's a guy that we really like on the field. Yeah.

Q. Brian, when you look at your quarterback play tonight, what do you feel like you've found there and whether it's something that feels sustainable going forward or just a rhythm with those guys from --

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, so listen, here's what we know, right, we got an experienced guy that's accurate throwing the football. He's got a live arm. He can make a lot of throws.

You saw the throws he makes. He's not afraid to put the ball in tight windows. He can see the field very well. What we needed to do, as coaches, we needed to put him in a position that makes him feel the most comfortable.

And it's better that he doesn't have a structured offense that slows him down. You know, we need to put him in shotgun. I know that sounds crazy because he kind of grew up with, you know, a much more direct snap play

action, but it's not the best version. At least that's what we thought.

And so, when we self-scouted and went through the bye week, we spent most of our time putting the offense together with Jack being in much more of a tempoed offensive structure.

And then fitting in Buchner where we felt like we would get matchups with defensive personnel. So, yeah, we think it's extremely sustainable based upon the body of work through four quarters.

I think if we're sputtering again and maybe we look at it and go, Okay, this is just going to be trying to put this thing together. But we felt pretty good after today.

Q. And then, Tyler, overall, how much has his grasp of the playbook grown or how much more from week one to now? Is he comfortable running the --

BRIAN KELLY: Well, if you take the snippets of where we put him in the game, they were very big parts of the game. That guy's on the sideline, it's cool out, it's 40s, and he's standing on the sideline, and we have confidence to put him in the ball game in those crucial situations. So I think that answers where we feel like he fits. And we trust him.

Q. Brian, specifically, you talked about learning some things about your team tonight. But after USC cuts it to a one possession game late there, your offense goes eight plays, 75 yards, takes four minutes off the clock. What do you learn in that setting from your offense and then conversely your defense then closing out the game with a turnover?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think it was all the things I had mentioned earlier, right? Five guys playing together, the ability to run the football when you needed to, a quarterback that was going to still continue to push the ball into some tight windows, and play some man coverage. He made some big throws in some tight windows.

So I think it was all that coming together in those last, what I call response drives, two touchdowns that they made, USC, that we had to come back and respond.

So we knew that this is a gritty team, right? They did that tech -- (loss of ZOOM connection) -- how this thing was all coming together as one. And tonight was a better indication of how that comes together as one.

Q. And then a little bit better picture on coming together, that's four in a row versus USC. I think it had been --

BRIAN KELLY: 7 out of 10.

Q. Yeah. That, too.

BRIAN KELLY: I don't keep count, but Katie told me.

Q. But that's the best stretch for Notre Dame, either one, since '83 to '93. What do you think that says about the stability and the trajectory of your program?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I mean, look, you guys know that I'm not much for talking in terms of, you know, what it means other than we've been well prepared, our kids want to succeed.

And, look, we -- we take this game really serious. Obviously, it starts at the top. This is an important game. And we bring that importance into the building when it's time to get ready for USC. It's really important. And so, we take it as such.

Q. Brian, I'm just curious: Have you done that with a quarterback? You're basically -- he's played a certain way for years and years and you get him to basically play a different style. Has that happened with you before?

BRIAN KELLY: I had it with Tony Pike at Cincinnati. He was a traditional dropback player. Ken Smith at Central Michigan, similar. He was playing for Mike DeBord in a very two-tight end, three-tight end oriented offense, and we put him in a spread offense.

You know, I like guys that, you know, have accuracy in throwing the football and see the field. And he's got accuracy and he can see the field.

So it was just trying to kind of find what was his niche. And, you know, we've seen enough snapshots of what it was.

And, look, I'll -- this is one game. But it was a good snapshot of what we think he can be the rest of the year for us.

Q. And your defense, the first three-quarters, what was key to them keeping USC out of the end zone, even though they moved the ball on you guys?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, so -- that's a good question. We didn't fall for a double-move, which we did, you know, late in the third quarter. Which was crazy.

The emphasis was, you know, if Drake's going to catch his

balls, which he did. He had 13 receptions before the double-move. He hadn't impacted the game. Because we kept him in front of us.

So it was to not to fall for double-moves and not give up any big plays. Unfortunately, later in the game, we gave up a couple big plays.

Q. I'm going to drill down a little bit on the offensive line. Kyren Williams, I think it was a 38-yard run. Patterson, Kristofic kind of double-teamed. You sort of see a little bit of, like, this is how you play together. (Loss of ZOOM connection.)

BRIAN KELLY: So I'll go back to -- I think I talked about this a little bit more with bigger bodies, with Kristofic, I think there's a sense there with Patterson.

He's out to the second level a lot more. There's a little bit more control at the line of scrimmage and it's allowing him to get up to that second level a little bit more.

It was a little bit more work where he was grinding at the line of scrimmage to try to control a shade. He's now getting a lot more help at the line of scrimmage. We're bigger. And I just think we're now developing a little bit more continuity with the five of those guys.

Q. When you were sort of self-scouting and you got to Coan tonight, was there a point -- do you remember sort of conferencing with Tommy Rees and being, like, Okay, what do you think about going in this direction? What sort of triggered that?

BRIAN KELLY: So we had no glaring -- there was nothing glaring in terms of what we were doing that was giving any tendencies, other than we were in direct snap or we were in predictable third down situations.

So we wanted to get out of the predictable situations with Jack. So that was part of the self-scouting that allowed us to start thinking about, Let's throw it on first down, let's be a little bit more unpredictable with him.

And, hence, that came through the self-scouting, is that we were maybe a little bit too predictable. Run, run, throw on third. Okay, pin your ears back, go get Jack Coan.

Q. Do you think sort of the trial and error in that aspect was sort of necessary to get to this point with Jack?

BRIAN KELLY: I mean, I -- I would have liked to have been smarter and not have had to go through all this. But I think at the end of the day, Pete, look, you're -- we didn't

have him here.

We didn't know, really, until we played games. Like, if we had three/four exhibition games, maybe we could have figured it out. But I think we really needed games to figure out what his sweet spot was.

Q. Coach, when you say the prognosis on Kyle is good, does that mean there's a shot for next week?

BRIAN KELLY: Oh, yeah. He's up moving. I'm not -- you know, I'm not going to tell you it's a 100 percent sure. But they felt like if he was moving around with the kind of injury he had today, things looked pretty good.

Q. And I know you're not in charge of ticketing and marketing, your thoughts on the atmosphere tonight?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, I'm glad you said that. I -- I -- I thought the atmosphere was outstanding. And I don't know what the ticketing situation was because that's not my job, nor is the marketing.

But I like the fact that the lights came back on after they went off. (Laughing). That's kind of all I would say about that.