

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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South Bend, Indiana, USA

Brian Kelly

Press Conference



BRIAN KELLY: That was a great day, obviously. You don't get many of these opportunities as a head coach, where you have a Senior Day and you have a resounding victory and it's not snowing in November in South Bend.

It was just a terrific day. Guys executed at a high level. What's not to like about what happened today. No injuries that I was informed of. Players played to their potential, and we go three weeks now without giving up a touchdown.

For those that are interested in style points -- and I know you don't like me for this, but I'm not -- I covered that one too. I've got to be popular today. So let's try to get the tough questions out of the way first.

Q. Maybe only a tough question because again it's a line of questioning that you don't always want to go down. You said what's not to like about today? I'd ask what's not to like about your team in the big picture? How do you feel about where you stand right now?

BRIAN KELLY: It's an improving team that continues to do things the right way. From an offensive standpoint, the quarterback is effective and efficient. You've seen that we keep our throws, we're in the low 20s, high completion percentage, pushes the ball down the field. We have one of the best tight ends, if not the best tight end, in the country, an effective running game, and a defense that hasn't given up a touchdown in three games.

When you're really looking for teams with that kind of resume of staying power, of control of a game -- and that's really what you're looking at. We've been in control of games. Even the Virginia game, people talk about the quarterback didn't play, but if you watch that game, we were in control of that game from the start to the finish. So that's what I like about this team.

Q. When you looked at where your team started this year and where you are now, did you think you'd see this much improvement?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, you're a teacher, you're an educator. You're always looking to see growth and improvement, but you never really know what that arc looks like. So sometimes it's measured in much smaller increments.

This has been a little bit larger in those increments. So I think we all would want to see the growth. It's just been to the point where this is a really good football team.

Q. When did you realize today could maybe go the way that it ended up going? Did you have a good feeling about the way the team came out today?

BRIAN KELLY: They were really loose and wanted -- there was a lot of talk about creating their own energy this week, playing for the love of the game itself and not carrying too much baggage, whether it be playoffs or Senior Day. It's why do you play?

One of the narratives that was kind of interesting is that the players always had to push back when they were young, when they were young playing, that they played because they loved to play. That's why they played this game today. So we kind of used that as what this week was about is that they love to play.

They went out there, played fast and free, and it showed itself.

Q. It's hard to imagine better Senior Day moments than what Myron was able to do with the fumble return for a touchdown. What was the reaction like on the sideline for that?

BRIAN KELLY: It was amazing. Isaiah Foskey did a great job of taking care of the quarterback, and then the only other person that had the speed was the running back. Thankfully, he's not a great tackler. That's why he's a running back, which allowed Myron to get into the end zone.

Q. Switched ball in the hands and stiff-arm. I don't know that you caught that.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think Coach Elston maybe over coached that a little bit, but it was great. There was a great amount of energy on the sideline.



Q. Jack seemed pretty sharp, other than the sacks early, but what did you like from what he did today?

BRIAN KELLY: He moved the ball around. There were a couple of key third down situations, one in particular he found Kyren on a drive route, where we had just put that in with Kyren on the drive, and he was the third -- well, he could have been the fourth eligible receiver on that play.

Just his patience and going through his progression. The two sacks, we got exposed a little bit on those two plays, but we made a couple of corrections on them later. But his poise, his confidence, his vision, it's been really good.

Q. To follow up on one injury, Jack Kiser looked like he had an ankle injury. Would he have been able to come back in?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, nothing structurally, high ankle. We feel pretty good about it.

Q. Sort of taking today in from the sidelines, what's sort of going through your mind first quarter, second quarter, as you're seeing the team play the way you hoped that they could but maybe have not seen?

BRIAN KELLY: The building of the team throughout the year. Each week we do a well, better, learn. What did we do well? What can we do better? What did we learn about this team? And we take the time each week to really delve into who we are.

That process has put us in a position where today we've seen that we have grown as a football team. So I'm watching this football team out there that looks nothing like it did back when we played Toledo. So that's growth. That's coaching. That's players being -- you know, understanding how they needed to grow as well.

So it's just everybody coming together and finding that 1 percent more each and every week.

Q. I think even late in the game you were still coaching Tyler Buchner as he came off the field. I think he missed a third down throw. What did you say to him? What did you want to hear back from him? What was that moment?

BRIAN KELLY: What Tom and I decided at halftime is we wanted to run the entire offense. We didn't want it to be hokey in the sense of we needed this -- this was an important half for him to continue to develop. We were just talking about where the ball needed to be dropped down. Deion Colzie was coming underneath. They had carried the seams, and it was the natural progression for him to

drop it down.

So we need to continue to coach and develop during those times, and the really, really important times for him because he's still growing as a quarterback for us. Again, he's such a really good player, but he needs those moments as well.

Q. In a game that was light hearted enough that you could sort of give J.D. Bertrand a little bit when he didn't get that pick in the first half?

BRIAN KELLY: So J.D. and I have been talking a lot about the back side seam route that you can harken back to some games in particular where that back side seam route has been an issue for us. So we've gone back and forth on it that when are you going to get your hand on one of those balls? And he finally did. So it was nice.

Q. 12 third down stops, and I registered 11 of them because of pressure or sacks. You mixed it up with blitzes, some non-blitzes, and Isaiah Foskey is there also.

BRIAN KELLY: The pick stunts were great. Freeman and Elston worked really well together today. They were on it. We had some good things going on up front. The design of some of those, they were coming clean for us, and sometimes you hit them really well. Some weeks you don't. This week we hit a lot of those stunts right on.

Q. I'm sure Isaiah Foskey doesn't need a lot of motivation, but he was one of the few guys that didn't have sacks and pressures last week, and today he had four on third down alone. Is it just they didn't double-team him as you referenced earlier in the week?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, you can watch the film for yourself. He's a guy that you don't want to leave him out there by himself.

Q. Brian, I don't know if it came at the bye week or maybe a week or two later, but you said you kind of re-evaluated some of the things you were doing defensively. Where have you improved in these last 12 1/2 quarters without a touchdown?

BRIAN KELLY: Gap responsibility and zone coverage. Bunch awareness in man coverage. Everybody knew we played a lot of man coverage early on. We had to mix some things up.

At the end of the day, I think it still was getting into a new system and feeling much more comfortable with it. But

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those were a couple of the things that we settled into that have improved measurably. And the tackling, at the end of the day, is so much better.

Q. You had mentioned a couple of Georgia Tech's offensive linemen during the week. You made that look like a really bad offensive line.

BRIAN KELLY: Well, as I said, we had some games up front that we hit really well today, and I'm not going to back away from that comment. I think they, in particular the left tackle is really good. We caused them some issues relative to some of the games up front.

Q. Brian, in the last few games or few weeks, how have you noticed Jack and Tommy's connection or synergy, it seems like just from what you see on the field there, working more in lock step than where they were at the beginning of the year. How have you seen that grow just beyond kind of the expected ways you think it would with time together?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think that naturally happens, Patrick, when you're together through the year. But Jack's an extraordinary kid in the sense he's got a high football IQ. He's not a guy that you have to -- he doesn't require extra reps. That's why this thing has taken off. It hasn't required a lot of reps. If it had, this would have been the slower adaptation of this version.

Jack deserves a lot of credit for that because he is a smart football player. And then he knows exactly what Tom's asking him and their connection -- because I'm there in the meetings. You can tell that there's that connection, and then he's able to apply it to the field.

Q. So we were talking about with Senior Day and everything like that and the performance of the seniors, but I also wanted to talk about -- ask about how did you feel about the performance of some of the underclassmen as well, working with the seniors and having such a definitive victory? And also the final drive with guys like Tyler Buchner and Audric Esteime and how they performed.

BRIAN KELLY: This entire team has been about young players merging with veteran players and how that has really made this a special season because that doesn't normally happen. Sometimes it's not easy when younger players are put into the mix, so to speak, with veteran players.

We have a younger group of players in our locker room that are selfless, that model to what our upperclassmen do. They're not resistant to the standards that we have in our

program. So they follow. But yet are confident in their own abilities as well, that they don't just walk around and follow blindly.

So it's been a really good blend and a really good mix. I've had teams where we haven't had that really good mix of young players and veteran players. This sounds like I'm talking about things that don't matter to you, but the chemistry of this football team is what it is because of young players that have allowed themselves to be led by our veteran players in a manner that has allowed it to grow as a football team, and that's the real story here.

Q. Brian, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the offensive creativity, especially those end around plays. The last couple weeks, you guys have run a couple of those in both games with three different receivers. What is it that you like about that play in particular and some of the different looks you guys have created over the last few weeks?

BRIAN KELLY: We're a big inside duo team. We were third and short. We brought Kevin over, and we hadn't shown Kevin as a guy we would run the handoff sweep to. He's been mostly the guy blocking the safety. So we're just trying to get out on the perimeter because everybody packs it so hard inside. So you're just trying to find a way to pick up those tough yards.

And just be creative, like you said, in picking up one or two yards to keep the chains moving.

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