

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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Dick Corbett Head Coach

Brian Kelly

Press Conference

Notre Dame 34, Navy 6

BRIAN KELLY: Have such respect for Navy and Kenny Niumatalolo. Just the game itself, playing the game, it's a difficult game to prepare for, so we're extremely pleased with the win.

Proud of my team and the way they prepared all week and the way they executed today. Defensively we played very well. I mean, we were detailed, focused. We trusted our teaching, trusted the guy next to each other, and got back to the foundational principles of playing really good defense. That is communication, assignment, tackling, and that was on display today.

Offensively didn't get off to a great start, but kept at it. It's a bit of a unique defense in the way they play it. A lot of Tampa 2, a lot of Drop 8, they mix in some pressures.

So I thought we stayed at it. It's a defense that you just got to kind of be patient and keep prodding, and I think we did a nice job there and broke the game open.

Really good victory. Proud of our group, and gets us another step closer to where we want to be.

With that, open up to questions.

Q. Coan to Kevin Austin near the end of the half for 70 yards, just the way your defense was playing, that seemed to be the boost you needed to kind of be able to call your game plan the second half.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, no doubt it helped. Thought we managed the back half of the second quarter pretty good. We wanted to see how we were playing there defensively to decide how to use the timeouts. First down was the key.

Kept them under four yards on first down, and then I was able to use the timeouts strategically. And then any time we have one timeout with 1:10, 1:15, we feel like we are in

pretty good shape to be aggressive.

We ran four vertical. Jack used his eyes to influence the safety. Pulled the safety, and came all the way back across the field and was able to find Kevin in the hole shot. It was something we had game planned all week.

Q. You were pretty certain those first couple runs to Kyren you were going to get some yardage there because they were backing up a little bit?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, so typical two-minute drive where if you try to get too much too soon you end up punting the football back to them. I thought that we were going to be able to get the ball out of what in our eyes was a vulnerable position at the end of the half if you don't get out to at least the 30 yard line.

So I was happy to run the football there and get a little bit of breathing room and take some shots.

Q. Any update on Avery Davis?

BRIAN KELLY: It's a knee injury. Our doctors aren't certain until we get an MRI, so we'll get an MRI and then we'll know for sure.

Q. Kurt Hinish with 10 tackles and it took him not even three quarters.

BRIAN KELLY: Game ball, game ball.

Q. How important was he coming into this game given what Navy wants to do, and what did you see that he got that game ball?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, so we had some guys on this defense that had some experience playing the option, he being one of them. We were relying heavily on him. Drew White was the other. Drew tore his PCL during the week and played with a torn PCL.

You know, we were banking on Hinish and Drew, didn't know if Drew was going to be able to play. He's a warrior. Rob Hunt was amazing. I think he moved in with him this week and got him ready.

But Drew just had the just mental toughness to play



through it. So getting back to Kurt Hinish, you had Hinish, you had Drew as the inside guys that really needed to come up big for us and they did. In particular, Hinish was virtually unblockable inside. We were hoping that was going to be the case and it came out that way.

Q. Then on defense looked like kind of a 5-2 front. What did you guys like about that in game planning, and how much of that was Marcus versus Elston both having experience like you talked about earlier in the week?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, you know, we played both an even and an odd front. A lot of teams play one front. We played multiple fronts. You saw them use the clock up a couple times. Had to use timeouts because we were moving the front. Can't get a bead on what we were playing.

And that was just -- we were moving the front late on them so they couldn't get a bead on it. Three down, four down, playing some man, some cover one. You know, it was a combination of what we played in the past and a little bit of what Marcus and a blend of everything, and proved to be very effective.

Q. In total, as well as you played defensively against them, I know it's not best Navy team you've played, but in terms how you executed it.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, the execution was on point. Everybody was in a great position. You know, I think other than the reverse where we slipped underneath the tackle and didn't leverage the football. Everything was leveraged the right way. I would agree with you that the '19 team that Navy had better all-around talent across the board.

But this could have been in terms of the fits inside out was as good as we fit the option in quite some time.

Q. Jack Kiser, kind of a safety role. I am assuming that would have been Hamilton if was healthy. What made you think, Okay, that's a good spot for him in this defense?

BRIAN KELLY: You know, the quarterback that was in there was a big kid. Unfortunately got hurt. We wanted to bend him back. You know, we felt like Kiser can run as well as any of our safeties. The way we play, you know, that structure, we wanted some physicality and size there.

Didn't want to get caught in situations where if they started to run the quarterback that we would be in a lot of third and shorts, so that was the mindset there in terms of using him in that position.

Q. If Avery Davis is out for a while, can you make a move to get more receivers in there? Essentially you'll be down to four scholarship healthy guys who are active.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think we've already talked about an alternative to add somebody into that position, which we'll discuss with you guys next week.

Q. You talked about the slow start offensively. What did the drive that Tyler Buchner led for the first touchdown, why was that able to be successful and what did that do for the offense?

BRIAN KELLY: We started to run him a little bit. There was a little bit more read at the line of scrimmage, you know, so we were a little bit more deliberate. Obviously hit a big slant versus cover zero down there.

You know, it's just been a natural progression getting him in the game. I don't know if there was anything magical other than we were running his package and it was a change-up from that standpoint.

Q. Another safety, Xavier Watts got to see some action today. What allowed him to find a role against this Navy offense?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think he's a young man that we been trying to get on the field. I thought he played pretty good. He ran the alley very well. Made a couple really good plays late in the game.

Just, again, trying to get him comfortable to get him on the field in a more consistent role. Hopefully this kind of gets him moving, you know, in that direction where there is some confidence building other than just in special teams where we can get him involved more.

This weekend obviously a team that throws the football as much, we're going to have all hands on deck, and this would be a great opportunity for him to play more.

Q. Then how did you think Chris Tyree handled things?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, much better. He felt good after. Talked to him and I think we're trending in the right direction there.

Q. You mentioned moving some fronts and doing it kind of later in the play clock. What kind of demands or trust does that require for the players, and how much does the ability to do that today show the progress of this defense?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, it was a point of emphasis this week. You know, we were a little disappointed with our communication last week, a little disappointed with our tackling.

So our standard, from a defensive standpoint was about that in terms of the emphasis in what we talked about all week. So you can imagine that it was overemphasized during the week. It was nice to see that come to fruition and executed very well this game.

Q. Just the progress of the defense, you've got players that see the option Marcus has seen, but (indiscernible.)

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I mean, we needed to make some progress. You know, I mean, we weren't happy with some of the things last week, and so we needed to see the incremental progress.

And so this week was much better, but it's a snapshot, right? Next week we got a team that's one of the more prolific passing offenses in the country.

Job well done. Check mark on the old option. Let's go see how we handle now Brennan Armstrong and the Cavaliers.

So this is work in progress for us. We like the step we took today because the communication was really good and the tackling was much better. We got to go cover some people next week.

Q. This is 39 straight now wins over unranked teams. We never talk about that, longest streak in the country. What does that say about your group over this period time? That's 40 straight wins when you put 30 or more on the board. So in terms of not losing a shootout in that span, what does that mean to you?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, I guess that's pretty consistent. You know, consistency and performance is important, right, in anything you do. So what we're doing, how we do it on a day-to-day basis, is for us about our process every single day, and we stick with it.

It's proven to be effective, so, you know, sometimes I get up here and it sounds like the same old, same old, but it's proven to be pretty effective. Our guys probably feel the same way, too. They hear it every day. But they believe in it. They're 100% bought in on how we do things on a day-to-day basis, and our standards have shown that it's been really effective.

So we won't be changing anything any time soon.

Q. Speaking of consistency, last year's game was canceled due to the pandemic. How significant would you consider this game in terms of continuing the Notre Dame/Navy rivalry tradition?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, I think -- is Jack here? Didn't we just sign a new 10-year deal? We have a new 10-year deal with Navy, so I think we're going to be playing Navy for another ten years. I'll be able to watch that on TV in the back end of that rivalry. Jack will still be here, I'm sure. (Laughter.)

Look, here is what I will say: Navy is a difficult opponent to play. Very difficult. It's hard to play them. Look, we didn't run seven on seven this week, right? Didn't get our two-minute drill in this week. We didn't get on the of the basic perimeters of football that prepare you each week. Things that you do naturally each and every week, we didn't do them.

Now we got to go switch. We didn't run seven on seven now for 10 days and we got to go play Virginia. So those are real. Those are hard things. But it's all worth it when you get a chance to go hand in hand with the Naval Academy as they sing their alma mater.

There is nothing like that. Where else in sport does that happen where you play on the field in intense competition, and then our players are arm in arm with their players as their alma mater is being sung.

It's pretty special from that standpoint. So the coach and me, you know, it's hard, but the special moments that you get in playing this game, it can't be duplicated anywhere else. So that's my soapbox.

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