

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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Coach Marcus Freeman

Press Conference



Notre Dame 24, California 17

MARCUS FREEMAN: Found a way to finish. I'm proud of those guys. You know what, it is hard to win football games. It's hard. You've seen it in the first three games. It's hard. So I'm so proud of that group of guys to find a way to finish. Obviously there's a lot of work to do. We have to get better.

You know what, tonight is going to be about celebrating this victory, and I'm proud of them. It's an honor to do it here at this university with this support system. This is a special day for me personally, but hopefully for this program and this university.

I'll open it up for questions.

Q. How does it feel to get your first win here?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Ooh, I keep trying to tell myself to enjoy it. There's a lot of coaching that happened on that field today that we can learn from, but listen, if you don't take a minute to enjoy these things, you're going to regret it. That's what I keep reminding myself is enjoy this victory. We'll get back to work tomorrow, but again, I want to celebrate with those guys.

This is about those guys that work and prepare, those coaches that prepare their tails off. This is something we're all going to share together.

Q. We've heard you talk about how the success of this team will be up front on both sides of the ball. Curious your assessment on how you played on both lines today.

MARCUS FREEMAN: You know, did not love the way we played in the first half. I've got to go back and watch the film and see what the issues were. I know offensively we had a couple three-and-outs. We fumbled the ball the first half. We weren't playing clean football. Defensively we held them to 10 points, but we have to be better.

You know, to see those guys come out in the second half and the offensive line really dictate the running game, and to see that, and D-line get after the quarterback, that's going to be our backbone. We're going to depend and rely on our O-line and D-line, and I was really proud of the way they stepped up to the challenge in the second half.

Q. Obviously slow to start for Drew Pyne and the offense; how did you guys get him to settle in? I know you relied on the running game a lot, but he settled in a little bit after that.

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, first you're like, okay, he'll get it. Tapped him on the shoulder pad, and then I said, okay, that's not working. I kind of went to the other end of the spectrum, kind of ripped his butt a little bit. That didn't work too much; we fumbled the next snap -- I think that was after the fumble. But you know what, I told Drew, relax, man, go out and be Drew Pyne and execute, and it helped because you gained a little confidence in the running game in the second half, and then he started making those passes, and we had -- wide outs have to do their job. It's not on Drew Pyne. We had a couple drops that we have to make sure they don't happen.

But he is a warrior, man. He is a competitor. He's a great example for everybody in that locker room because you never know when your number is going to be called, and Drew Pyne always prepared as a starter.

To see him get his opportunity, I'm really happy for him.

Q. You had three shots at a turnover down the stretch and still didn't technically get it. Yet you had the pass rush, you stopped the run, you contained their passing game. You did give up a long touchdown drive in the third quarter, but really settled in after that.

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I remember I said to the sideline after we gave up that touchdown drive, I think we were down three, and I said this isn't going to be a repeat. This isn't going to be "here we go again." We're going to change the outcome of this game, and it's going to be by our offense going out there and doing what we have to do and executing, and then our defense when we get the opportunity we're going to go out there and execute, and that's what you saw. We needed that. That was a big moment for us because I could see it on some guys' faces



and even mine, like, oh, shoot, here we go again. No, it's not here we go again; we're going to change the outcome by the way we execute and by how hard we play.

It was great to see that. To answer your question on turnovers, I did see it was more deliberate. We were trying to get the ball out. DJ Brown gets a penalty for trying to rip the ball out, and he throws the guy down, we got a stop on the whistle, and that was the right call, but it was deliberate, and I mean, just can't buy one at the end of the game. J.D. gets the targeting and almost get a chance the last play of the game, but we're going to focus on the positives. We're going to focus on the positives.

Q. You had five, six defensive linemen, I think, combine for six sacks, six more quarterback hurries. Is that what you envisioned in the second half of games, that that unit would take over games even if the other team had some success early passing?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, it's a deep unit. I was hard on them. Coach Washington, I was hard on that unit. Even after the first half, a couple QB scrambles, but they know I believe in them. There was one point Jayson Ademilola in the second half, he walked over to me and he said, Coach, I got you. I got you. Went out and made a sack. That's what you want, man. You want some guys to take ownership in the performance on the field. That's a deep group. Coach Wash does an excellent job with that group, and we're going to need them all. We're going to need them all to have a relentless pass rush.

Q. What was your conversation with Coach Rees either at halftime or midway through the second quarter when the offense started moving a little better? It seemed like all of a sudden running the ball on the first 1st down, getting some positive yards, staying ahead of the sticks was the key to finally moving the ball there.

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, that might have been mentioned on the headset. Listen, Coach Rees is a great coach, and he's just as frustrated as everybody else in terms of the outcome.

I got his back, like I told him. Yeah, I wanted to run the ball. I felt like we were moving the ball and let's continue to run it, but you can't run the ball the whole game. To me that opens up some holes in the pass game.

I was proud of him saying, okay, you know what, let's go, let's get some runs, let's get the momentum going, and then he kind of took over. He made the check. That touchdown to Audric, I'm sitting there screaming, get the call, go, go, go, and he's like Coach, I got a check, bam,

made the check, scores a touchdown. I'm like, that's why I need to shut up and let you do your job.

I'm proud of him and that whole offensive staff. Guys, it was a tough week for all of us, from me on down, that we had to really look at ourselves and really say, okay, what do we have to do to -- sometimes you don't want to hear, you really don't want to know where the negative aspects of what you're doing are. But in order for us to get better, you had to take a deep dive into yourself first. Me as the head coach, our position coaches, on to our players, and really take accountability for our performance and attack it in practice.

Listen, we didn't play a perfect game, but we found a way to win, and we're going to do that after a victory. We're going to have to go back on Sunday, enjoy this thing tonight and take a deep dive into where we have to execute better and what we have to do. But it's a lot better after a win.

Q. It seemed like going off of what you said, some of the early plan or what worked as you went on was try to get some guys out on the perimeter in quick throws. What did you like about that in terms of what suits your skill players' strength but also for Drew to see the ball go in receivers' hands?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, he's most comfortable on those -- a little bit on the run and getting easy passes. In the very first play of the game, had him on a run, rolled out and easy pass, and we end up dropping it. Yeah, that's got to be a better throw, but we've got to execute.

We've got to make sure that -- we've got to have people that make the quarterback look good. A lot of the result of play falls on the shoulders of the quarterback, but there's so much that happens during a play that really dictates the outcome, but the quarterback is going to have to answer to it.

So again, Drew just continued to battle. He continued to make good decisions, and he finished the game for us.

Q. What's going through your mind in that final minute where you think you've got it wrapped up and then the targeting and you think you have the fumble and that's overturned, just as far as, "come on" almost, anxious?

MARCUS FREEMAN: It was a conversation between me and God, and it was a conversation between me and myself to focus on what matters, and I looked at J.D. and I wanted to talk to J.D., but there was a lot of things going ahead. But ultimately, you know what, you've got to focus on what it takes to execute.

But there was some, Lord, what is going on. I looked at J.D. and said, J.D., really? But you know what, that's the challenge, is that our minds can drift, mine included, to the outcome, to the future, to okay, last week, if we can beat Cal -- we can't worry about that. The minute that happens, you have to get your mind back to what it takes to give yourself a chance to have success, and that's our preparation.

It's the same thing today. We're going to enjoy this thing. We're going to go back tomorrow -- we're not worried about we're going to beat North Carolina -- no. What does it take to have success? You've got to evaluate, you've got to practice it, and then get to Saturday when it comes.

Q. Was the second half offensively an example of accepting who you guys are offensively, and is that difficult as a coach sometimes when maybe you want to be like up tempo, take deep shots like you did last week, but that's just not who your personnel is right now?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah. For this game, that's what we had to do. You know, I'm not saying this is going to be who we are every game all year. We have to take advantage of what we feel like we can have success against the defense we play. Today it was -- we weren't having success early in the first part of the game with our quick game, and handling snaps.

So we said, okay, right now the edge we have is being able to run the ball. So to me that's what we've got to be able to do. Listen, our identity, yep, we're an O-line, D-line driven program. We've got to be able to run the ball, but you can't just say, this is what we're going to do; that's it.

You've got to be able to adjust to what is having success and adjust to what an offense or defense is giving you.

Q. During the week, Rees talked about Tyree and the trust you guys have in him. Was today an example of that, and what does it do to sort of have a reliable skill position guy like him?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, it was tough because Logan was out. Really he had an illness on Thursday, missed practice Thursday with an illness. In our minds it was like, okay, we're going to have to ride the back of Chris and Audric right now, and they both ran the ball really well. I don't know how many yards they had, but I thought they both did a good job in the backfield with the ball.

Q. What did you see from Drew during the week? It was his first career start but he's obviously played a

lot of football, got you guys the win. What did you see from him during the week about accepting the challenge and responsibility?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Oh, man, he was a little bit too excited. I'm like Drew, calm down, calm down. I texted him Monday or Tuesday, I can't remember what day it was. I'm like, I told you at some point in the season this time is going to come, and I did. I was in my office when we told him that we were going to name Tyler Buchner the quarterback, and I said, at some point during this year, you're going to have to lead this program to a victory and maybe multiple victories.

I texted him, here it is, and he was so excited. He was preparing, preparing. We had to kick him out of the office a couple times. Go home, get some rest, stop watching film. But that's who Drew Pyne is. He's an ultimate competitor. He's going to prepare the right way, and this is going to be a momentum builder for him.

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