

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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South Bend, Indiana, USA

Coach Marcus Freeman

Press Conference

Notre Dame 44, UNLV 21

MARCUS FREEMAN: Any time you're able to get a win, but a win at Notre Dame Stadium is special.

Guys, we know it was a tough week for all of us. Anybody that's a part of this Notre Dame family or Notre Dame Nation and this football team, it was a tough week. I'm proud of the way our guys responded.

I'm proud of the way our fans and our students continue to support this team. You could feel it. I didn't know what it was going to be like today. To have that many students come back after fall break, and even the crowd, to feel the support of our crowd, it's special, and it helps us. It does.

So I'm proud of our guys.

Listen, it wasn't perfect. We know that. That's the reality of football. It's never perfect. There's a lot of things that you're going to look and want to correct, but overall they played a really good game.

To be able to -- on all three phases. There was work to do on all three phases, but there was really big highs today on all three phases, and that was good to see, from special teams to offense to defense. They all played at points really, really well, and they all played at points not so well that we have to improve.

That's the reality of football. That's where we are as a team. We have to continue to get better, right? You're talking about the ebbs and flows of a season to get us to this point where you see it in a game. You see it within series.

For them to get a victory like this is really pleasing for them, for me, and for this program. With that, I'll open it up for questions.

Q. What had you guys seen on film that maybe you felt you could exploit with your punt block unit, and with this team's pretty small margin for error, how



important is it to be able to capitalize on those things?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Coach Mase has done a great job with all of our phases of special teams. Every week we've been an aggressive punt block unit, and we've gotten two before this game. We just got home. It wasn't that, hey, they had something in particular that we're going to exploit.

Every week we feel like we can take advantage of a punt team, and Coach Mason does a great job of executing the game plan.

Today we were able to get two, and those are game changers. Those are momentum shifts, to be able to capitalize off them and get points. I don't think both times got a touchdown, but to get points, it's huge. It's huge. And last week we didn't.

That's part of making sure that we're able to execute. Those are huge.

Q. And you referenced it, by no means a perfect game, but how much did you guys need a game like this where early on you got to feel good about yourselves and got to see some things go your way?

MARCUS FREEMAN: You know, the ability to give yourself -- to put yourself in position to win is really what we focus on, and that's the plan, the preparation, but at the end of the day, we're evaluated off of the result. We're evaluated off of did we win or did we lose?

We needed this. We needed this for our mentality, but our confidence to be able to just go -- and we are a good team. I've said that before. We are a good football team that doesn't always play that way. It's our job as coaches to get our team to perform this way, and what they showed today is, when they do a good job versus a good team -- I thought UNLV was a good team. I told Coach Ro before and after the game, he's got a good football team.

They didn't quit. It was 23-7 the first quarter. Don't expect that team to lay down. They battled back. Much respect to them, but it was a huge win for our program.

Q. Drew Pyne rushed to the goal line, pretty tough hit on his head and neck area. How was he when he got to the sideline right after that hit?

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MARCUS FREEMAN: He went to the doctor's and he tried to stay in the game. The doctors pulled him out to make sure they evaluate him. Then after that series, a couple plays, they said he was ready to go. He wanted to keep going, but the doctor said, you're out.

So they did the evaluation and they gave him the thumbs up to go back in the game.

Q. And the by-product of that was that Mitchell Evans touchdown. Not to get too in depth on it, but where did that come from, that design? Was that just a perfect moment? We have a quarterback question, let's get creative on that one.

MARCUS FREEMAN: We had done that previously in the game on that third and one. That was something we wanted to use in short yardage. Coach Reese creativity, right, short yardage. I challenged our offense. We've got to be more successful on short yardage attempts.

That was part of the creativity, and it worked on third and one, and then it worked on that situation.

I don't know if he would have called it if Drew was still in the game, but it executed, so maybe we'll expand that package a little bit.

Q. Kind of following up on the Pyne hit, you called a timeout after that. Did you ask them to look for targeting?

MARCUS FREEMAN: I did. From my viewpoint, just looking at the replay, I thought close to helmet to helmet. They said they reviewed it and contacted Greensboro, the headquarters, and they said it wasn't helmet to helmet.

Q. In the second half with the lead you had, it obviously stayed a little close, was there any thought to bringing Steve Angeli up at any point?

MARCUS FREEMAN: There was. There was. Before that last series, I said, hey, if they don't score here, let's get Angeli ready to go. Unfortunately, they went up and scored. I wasn't going to put Steve in right at that moment. I wanted to stay with the offense. We were able to go down and score and move the clock the way we wanted to.

But I wanted to get him in the game, yeah.

Q. When you look at your guys' red zone or short field offense with probably some more times you would have wanted to score and then their ability to get touchdowns in the red zone. Kind of how do you

process that as far as what you saw in those red zone moments on offense and then maybe what you would have liked to have seen in red zone defense there to force more field goals than you guys had?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, the point of red zone when you're on offense, you want to score touchdowns. On defense, you want to kick field goals.

At some point today it was a little bit opposite. Going into this game I wanted to -- if it was close -- last couple games I've been pretty aggressive on fourth and short. This game I wanted to, you know what, we're going to need Grupe to get some confidence. We need to kick the ball. I had told Coach Reese, hey, if it's fourth and two I'm going to kick it right now and really try to get some points on the board and get some momentum for our team.

That's what I told him. Hey, great job taking care of the ball. We get three points here, it's good momentum for our team.

Defensively, obviously, we don't want them to score. There's some things we'll go get fixed and review it and see what the issues were.

Q. Today it seemed like the first game where field position really swung to benefit you guys. What did that do, especially on a day where offensively it might not have been as crisp or even throughout the game as you might have wanted?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Field position is one of our keys to victory. Win the battle of field position, and obviously special teams helps tremendously with that. The ability to block two punts are huge, and the third punt we didn't block, but it forced a bad kick.

That's the winning format. If you want a chance to win, you've got to win the battle of field position, and today we were able to do that.

Q. You mentioned at the beginning that winning at home made this a very big victory for you. Is that something you stress to your players? And how important is it for you guys to get back that home-field advantage?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, this place is special. Notre Dame Stadium and the history and tradition of this place is something we all respect. We haven't had the greatest of showings in our home games. You can name a list of reasons why. I don't know.

But we needed to make sure our players understood the



importance of performing well at home. This is an advantage for us. It has to be an advantage for us. That's why I made that comment about it was great to get a good win in Notre Dame Stadium.

Q. So you physically talked to them about that?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q. Marcus, how do you diagnose the two -- as a former defensive coordinator, how do you diagnose the two big runs that UNLV pulled off today to get the points?

MARCUS FREEMAN: The first one, it was good. They hadn't showed the run scheme where they pulled the center, because I watched it on the replay and they pulled the center. The middle backer didn't get over the top of the block. It was one that you got to get drawn up. We were in base defense.

It was good news. Listen, good execution on their part. They were able to kind of scheme us a little bit on that run, and they tried it again later in the game and we were able to get it drawn up and fixed.

The second one was just a miss-execution, and ultimately it's on us, but we can't have them. Our field end's got to leverage the ball and keep it inside of him. He spills the ball and the ball goes outside, and it goes outside of there.

Those are critical errors we can't make. If you want to be a championship team, you want to be a great football team, you can't make those mistakes. Those will be two plays that we get corrected and we attack this week.

Q. On the real bright side for your defense, Isaiah Foskey showed up significantly in the game. I had him for -- I think he had the two blocked punts, three sacks. Did you see anything in practice this week that maybe was a little different about his effort?

MARCUS FREEMAN: I hope everybody in our program had a little sense of urgency this week. That comes from the top down. That was a big word for us was urgency. The minute we hit the practice field, we're going. The minute we come out of that locker room, we're going.

And the urgency that we must have is to execute. The urgency to do our job. The urgency to play really hard but understand what our job is and do our job.

Hopefully that was a reflection of it, but that's what you expect out of Isaiah Foskey. He can be a dominant football player, and we're going to need him to be,

especially these upcoming weeks.

Q. I just wanted to get your thoughts on the run game and anything in particular that led to Diggs being the workhorse today, and also the fumble again today and your thoughts on his development this year?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Audric's been running the ball extremely well. Unfortunately, he's fumbled the ball each of the last two games. I heard Coach Reese and Coach McCullough kind of say, hey, put Logan in the game right now. Let's go with Logan.

Again, there's no great running back -- I know we wouldn't have had 130 yards without five guys up front doing their job. Credit to the offensive line and their ability.

I think the best part about it is when UNLV knows you're going to run the ball, the ability to still run the ball, and I don't think we threw it that last series. That's big.

That's something I believe in. Hey, I don't know if the defense knows we're going to run the ball. We have to find ways to get positive yardage, and we were able to do that late in the game.

Logan's done a great job. He's continued to get better. That's a result of being unselfish. It's tough. You've got three great running backs. Everybody wants the ball. Today we rode Logan, and he had a great job.

Q. What can you say about the way J.D. Bertrand played today and the targeting that got overturned?

MARCUS FREEMAN: I was pleading with the refs. Do you understand, if he gets targeting he's out for the game. He's a difference maker when he's in there, and he's a really good football player. He's a physical football player. He is an extremely physical football player.

With that comes those helmet-to-helmet opportunities. It looked like the helmet hit the shoulder pad, which obviously they overturned it, and thank God it did because we can't afford to lose him for a game.

He's doing a great job. He's a guy that just practices his tail off. He maximizes every ability he has, so he makes us a better defense when he's in there.

Q. Lastly, what did you sense from the way Drew Pyne handled maybe some ups and downs today throwing the football?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, the big thing with Drew is just continue to be confident. I kept telling him, the ebbs and

flows of a season happen within a game. It's okay. You know what I mean? You have to get your mind right, get back to the sideline, and make sure you understand, the next opportunity you get, let's go. There's a reason why you're our starting quarterback. We all believe in you.

That's my biggest thing in him, be confident. If we throw the ball, let's go. Put the ball where it needs to be. It's never going to be perfect. As long as you continue to balance, one play, one life. We talk about that often.

It was good to see. I told him the biggest thing, get those guys up, let's go. We're confident, and let's go out there and execute.

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