

# University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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South Bend, Indiana, USA

## Coach Marcus Freeman

### Press Conference



Notre Dame 28, BYU 20

MARCUS FREEMAN: All right, man, as I told the team in the locker room, so proud of their fight. We knew BYU was going to be a tough team, and I told them at halftime, this team wasn't going to quit.

I challenged our guys to find a way to win, find a way to execute really when it mattered the most. I have to say something about the atmosphere here. Unbelievable. The amount of fans, this truly felt like a home game. It was a great environment. Credit to what this University, what this network, what this football program, the brand of Notre Dame is about. It was a unique experience, but as I told the team. That's what makes Notre Dame special is these Shamrock Series games, and this one was special. It was an honor to be a part of it.

Truly happy for our players, for our seniors, and it was a great win for our program. With that, open up for questions.

**Q. Coach, with everything that your defense has gone through, how good was it to have that defensive stand there fourth and one?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: It was big, because we needed it. I think we -- I don't know exact yards, 50-something yards at the half we held them to. Defensively held BYU to.

And then you come out in the second half, and to get the big play for a touchdown, and then they come back and they drive and it's just -- you can feel a sense of -- a little bit of panic. I kept telling them, calm down, calm down. We got to go back and just do our job, relax, one play.

To get the stop fourth and one, we challenged them. We challenged them on the sidelines, and there was a timeout right before that fourth and one and that was a huge play.

I'm really happy, and to build off of that and end on a high note and go back and be able to learn from those plays that obviously didn't go our way is extremely satisfying.

**Q. I know you've been looking for complementary styles at wide receiver. Jayden Thomas stepped forward. If you could comment on him and then Drew Pyne and his accuracy tonight.**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, what was Drew Pyne, pass completion, 22 of 28 is pretty good. You know, credit to our offensive line and protection and credit to those wideouts. They made big catches. I know Michael Mayer had a lot of catches, but those are catches. Those are catches that we need.

We need guys -- it's too often the quarterback gets too much blame and praise, right? We need guys to make the quarterback look good, and to see Jayden make some of those big catches that he made today was huge for the confidence of our wideouts and the confidence of our quarterback to be able to spread the ball around.

Really good to see that.

**Q. Is this sort of what you had in mind with the offensive line, defensive line, the fourth down stop, the safety, Audric's run on third and four, also Drew had a ton of time back there. Is this sort of what you thought you had?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I told them we needed them the most, they were O-line and D-line stepped up. In that big fourth down stop with our D-line and O-line being on that last drive to continue to get those first downs that we needed when they knew we were running the ball. They knew we were running it, and I told them, that's a sign of a great offensive line is when they know you're running the ball and you're able to get first downs. That's an O-line driven program.

Yes, this was an example of what I'm talking about. Now, do we need to get better? Absolutely. This was a great example of O-line and D-line driven culture.

**Q. Can you talk about finishing again, or is that...**

MARCUS FREEMAN: No. We're talking about the entirety of the game now. We don't talk about just finishing. It's really kind of putting those plays -- and that's hard, because even as a coach -- because as much as I want to



get mad about those two touchdowns and keep that in my mind and frustrated, you have to move forward.

Because reflecting on that, if you don't learn from it, it doesn't help you with the next play. The coaches have to challenge yourself first to say, move on. As mad as you are, move on and challenge the players to do the same thing.

**Q. (Regarding fourth down stop.) How do you want to handle that in the situation?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Well, you know what, he was going to test it out pre-game. He had a high ankle sprain and he practiced a little bit, but he didn't feel after warmups that he was going to be able to help us, and, you know, the doctors didn't feel like he was going to be able to help us.

We had to have some other guys step up, and Chris Smith is guy that's done a really good job. We wanted to play him more, and he did a good job stepping up. Gabe Rubio stepped up for Howard Cross. Some young guys have to step up. That's the beauty of this program in that we're pretty deep at the defensive tackle position. We are going to have to have some young guys step up here for the future.

**Q. I think you said Drew had 22 completions. Half of those went to Michael Mayer. I don't know what can be said anymore, but hopefully have some words.**

MARCUS FREEMAN: You know, he is a special football player. The thing he love about Michael Mayer is that he's the hardest worker. When your best player is your hardest worker, that's the greatest example you can have for young guys and the whole team. I am just going to continue to push him to be the hardest worker we have. Coach Parker and Coach Rees have done a great job of developing Michael. He's not a finished product. That's tough to say for a guy that probably holds every record at Notre Dame for tight ends. He understands that and he wants to be pushed. He's one of those great ones that doesn't want to be told what he does well. Tell me how I can improve. That's what makes him special.

**Q. Couple week ago after North Carolina really complimented Tommy Rees and then talked earlier tonight about the identity that you want on the offensive and defensive lines. Tommy had another excellent came. Is that more of what you envisioned him as a defensive guy. What do you like for the opposition?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: You know what? You look at -- what I love about what our offensive staff and Tommy has

done is they challenge each other in terms of the preparation. Today is a result of that. Today is a result of really having a critical eye in terms of evaluating everything we do. P.

That's what I think sometimes we get misconstrued, that it's all about the game. I know the result matters and that's how we're judged. But to get the result you want you have to prepare the right way, and that means having a critical eye, uncomfortable conversations every day during the week, and really challenging each other to find ways to improve.

That's what I love most about what Coach Rees and our offensive staff has done. Really challenged each other to practice at a higher level and ultimately perform at a higher level.

**Q. Found a way to win tonight in a neutral setting. How foundational is that for what you're trying to build right now and the future of the program?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: You know, it's what we're going to have to do until we get to the point where we're executing at a higher level, you know what I mean? We're going to have to find a way when these games are closer, playing a great opponent like BYU. That's a tough football team.

In these big games you have to win it at the end. College football, the parity is pretty close for a lot of us, and a team like BYU, you're going to have to find a way. They're never going to lay down. You have to find a way to finish.

If it comes down to that, that's what we're going to do.

**Q. I know you guys thought highly of Drew before he had to step in. Now the last two games what have you learned about him or what does it say about him that he's been the reason you guys you have won? (Indiscernible.)**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, he's an ultimate competitor. That's the one thing that makes him special. He competes. He prepares the right way. You know, I look at -- I think about that first half of the Cal game, and maybe a little bit more the first quarter. It wasn't a lack of confidence, but it was a lack of execution, and that really messes with your confidence.

Drew Pyne is always ready to go. Now what you're seeing is the execution starting to be there, so the confidence is continuing to rise. I just keep challenging him to continue to be the standard in terms of how we prepare, because he is, and he'll continue to get better and better.

**Q. You've been around here as a player, as a coach, what does it take for guys when they know they're at the top of the scouting report and they'll be a key on third down, like Mayer did so many times today? What's the mindset that you see and in a lot of those guys and maybe you see in Mike?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: I think you study your opponent. They understand what they're going to be challenged with. Like you have to have an idea what your opponent is going to do offensively and defensively and have a plan. What you see is Mayer knowing he's going to be single or double cover. He still has a plan. If a guy is going to play that outside leverage, he has a plan to break the leverage. That comes from coaching and preparation.

So those are things that the great players do. The guys trying to become great players just have to figure out what to do. The ones that are the great players like Michael Mayer and some of those guys, they say, okay, I know what the defense is going to do. How do I still find a way to win? You see he does that more than not.

**Q. How have you seen Audric Estime improve and find his role in a crowded backfield? And two, what goes through your mind? Is it excitement? Fear? All of above?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I would say a little bit of both. He's a bulldozer. When that bulldozer starts jumping, bulldozers aren't supposed to be off the ground. They're supposed to stay on the ground.

But to see him do that, it just shows his athleticism. He's playing at high level. Coach McCullough is doing a great job with the running back room. Logan Diggs. I know Chris Tyree didn't probably have the numbers that he had last week, but that three-headed monster, and I can't speak enough about the unselfishness of that room.

All three of those guys want to be the starter. All three of those guys want to have every rep. To be unselfish and to put the greater good of the team in front of yourself, that's the example we need for our team.

**Q. You talked about the atmosphere. How did Las Vegas treat you this week, and do you feel like more games like this one should be played in Las Vegas moving forward?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, there are some distractions now, and so it was good for us to come in here yesterday. I told them, your body is telling you, I don't care what the time is, your body is telling you on eastern time, so let's get ready to go to bed.

This stadium is amazing. What a beautiful stadium. This environment is -- I mean, I can't speak highly enough about it. I think Las Vegas, the city of Las Vegas attracts a lot of people, but the Notre Dame Nation a going to go no matter if we're in Dublin, Ireland next year or Chicago, Illinois last year, or Las Vegas this year. They're going to follow wherever we go. It felt like a home game. Those fans were strong and we can feel that and appreciate that.

**Q. Marcus, you mentioned that play from the guys up the middle. Jason Ademilola, what does he bring that allows... (regarding fourth down stop.)**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, he is, man, he's an emotional leader for that group. He's the guy that when things are tough he always comes and grabs, coach, I got you. He did to last year and does it this year. At the biggest moments he shows up.

You can't say enough about a guy like that, that you know in the biggest moments you can depend on. He is going to make sure he makes a play.

He just does his job really, really well. That's what our guys have to understand. You don't have to go make a play. You got to do your job really, really well, and the plays usually come to you. He's a very dependable player for us.

**Q. What informed the decision to go for two in the first half? Ended up being an eight point game. What went into that decision?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: At times I use the book. There is an analytics book. We knew that at some point we would have to go for two. That's kind of what the decision was. Hey, what's the book say right now? Book says -- I don't always use it, but at that moment I said, Okay, let's use it. I felt like we were having a rhythm, we were going, and felt confident, two point play. Didn't execute, and those are one of those things you look back and say, okay, if we won the call we would've kicked the extra point, would've been a nine-point game.

But if they would've scored, you know, would've had to go for two at some point. It was a close game. Those are decisions you have to make. You got to trust your instincts and don't look back. Got to study and say, okay, is there something else you would do. Trust your instincts.

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