

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

Sunday, September 16, 2018



Brian Kelly

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Your offense scored four times in the first half, and nearly had two scores in the fourth quarter. What do you think the next step is for this offense?

BRIAN KELLY: Consistency. We're a young group in so many areas of the skill: receivers, runningbacks, even the tight end position. Just experience, you know, getting them experience and getting them all on the same page. I think we're just going through that process of gaining more experience.

They play hard. They've got a great attitude. They've just got to grow up, and that will happen as they continue to get more playing time.

Q. I think you alluded on Saturday to the potential this offense has. You watch college football. Seems like the offenses that you can tell are never going to be any good don't have play-makers. That doesn't seem to apply to your team.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, right now doing the little things the right way all the time, from our wide receivers catching the football to running the right routes to getting the ball out on time. All those things, it's a process for us right now. We think that we've got players that can make plays in the game.

But we go to practice on Tuesday excited that we're only scratching the surface in terms of where we can be. You feel like you've got players that can make plays for you. We're just not there yet. We just got to continue to work on it.

Q. How did you come out of the game yesterday, any injuries to report, anybody banged up?

BRIAN KELLY: No. Just sore, bumps and bruises. Nothing that would have any players not be able to participate in practice on Tuesday.

Q. The defense, you said yesterday after the game that you're a good defense, not a great defense yet. If you're thinking about being a great defense come November, how close are you defensively to being pretty good?

BRIAN KELLY: I think we're similar where there's some things that we're doing that has got to get better. We're making some mistakes that I think good football teams don't make: eye discipline, getting a little bit better on

some of the coverage concepts, defensive communication still needs to get a little bit better.

As I mentioned, I think we play hard. We overcame some penalties. I like the fact that the four-man rush is getting some pressure. Our leverage has got to be better in the secondary. Those things take some time. We've got to get better at them if we want to move up the scale in terms of good to very good.

Q. It seemed like Brandon had a lot of his rushing yards yesterday off scrambling, making plays like that. With his running ability, do you think about maybe doing some designed runs for him to get him some more of those designed rushing plays in the game, use them more to your advantage?

BRIAN KELLY: No, I mean, there was really only one true scramble. That was for the touchdown. That was a pass play. Everything else were designed runs that we had set up for him. He may have scrambled one or two other times on some throws.

But, no, most of that was crafted runs for him. I think he had 18, 19 carries that were on the stat sheet. The lion's share of that are crafted runs for him.

Q. Do you think he needs to be the leading carrier for you guys to be successful or do you try to delegate, want Jones and Armstrong to get more carries than Brandon in a game?

BRIAN KELLY: No, I don't think we go in there with a set amount. I think I've had other quarterbacks that we tried to limit their carries. But it's part of who he is. He's one of our best runners, so he's going to carry the football.

I think you saw this weekend, in terms of carries, pretty good dispersing of the ball with Tony 17, Brandon 19, Jafar had 11. I think we're going to continue down that road where all three of those guys are going to have multiple carries.

Q. Talk about Elliott, knocking that football away from the wide receiver. How big was that play for you guys in the fourth quarter?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, a great play. We talk about the play is six seconds, play through the whistle, good things can happen. Jalen just staying with the play, getting after it, getting the ball out. Obviously a big

play in the game.

Q. You have to go on the road for the first time to Wake Forest. What do you like about your team at home, and what do you have to work on on the road?

BRIAN KELLY: We got to play with the same physicality that we did in week one and week three. That's pretty clear. Just need to be a little bit more consistent. We have really good spurts on both sides of the ball offensively and defensively.

I think when you go on the road, I think you have to play much more consistent for four quarters. I think that will be the challenge to this group this week, is we'll need consistent play for four quarters on the road.

Q. In the first half with 5:10 left to go, then in the third quarter with 4:47 left, you went ahead and created two very critical massive turnovers. Discuss how that impacted the game.

BRIAN KELLY: Well, certainly any time you take the football away, you create great energy and great momentum. That's obviously big in a football game.

Secondly, creating more opportunities for your offense. I don't recall, I don't have my notes in front of me, whether we turned those into points. Any time you get a turnover and have an opportunity to turn those into points, they certainly make a huge difference in ballgames.

Momentum, stops, turnovers, things of that nature obviously play a key role in the ultimate success of a football game.

Q. Moving forward to the Wake Forest game, especially coming up in two weeks against Stanford, how are you going to turn those field goals into touchdowns?

BRIAN KELLY: As I mentioned earlier, I think we have to be executing a lot better. Look, I mean, we're at a point right now from an offensive standpoint that we know who our players are going to be. We have to get them to execute better play in and play out. Our offense is certainly capable of playing much better.

You're right, I mean, we can't be settling for field goals. There's going to be times where you're going to need a field goal here or there, but we need to turn those into touchdowns when we get into the white and the blue zone.

Q. I'm going to beat a dead horse about your red zone offense. With Brandon leading your red zone offense, 75% touchdowns last year, him rushing for 14 touchdowns, is there something you think Book

brings to that situation that Wimbush doesn't have or is it keeping Book involved in and when you need him? He can make that play-action to his right, which would be an asset. With regard to his playing time, how would you qualify that?

BRIAN KELLY: I think we can manage some of the packages down there a lot easier. Certainly, as you know, when you get into what we call from the 20 yardline on in, red zone, white zone, then blue zone, those are specific packages. It's a lot easier to, you know, designate plays for a quarterback.

I think you'll continue to see that because it's easier to coach and manage those plays, rep those plays during the week. So what we really need to be better in is in that red and white zone. That's where we've stalled out a little bit.

The blue zone is where you've seen Book come in, which is closer to the five yardline. We're getting into some more direct snap, extra tight ends. That's where the run-pass opportunities from direct snap really fit Ian Book's game.

Q. Blue zone, you consider that inside the five or the ten?

BRIAN KELLY: Five yardline on in.

Q. White zone?

BRIAN KELLY: Anywhere from the six yardline to approximately the 14 yardline. Then 15 to 25 would be your red to high red.

Q. You explained pretty well how you feel this makes this two quarterback arrangement, it helps make your team better. Does it help Brandon become a better quarterback overall?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I don't think we're hurting the flow of the game or disrupting him in any fashion. He was in the game when we snuck it on the six yardline on fourth-and-one. It's a fluid situation. We just think we can continue to use his assets. He was in the game in most of those red zone situations.

We just got to get really much more efficient and effective in all areas, not just with Brandon and those scoring zones. Our receivers have to be better. As you know, we had a couple of drops there. We missed a protection. We didn't hold our line on some of the runs, vertical runs that we had. There's a lot of work to be done there and coached.

We won't upset his learning curve by the way we're going about it right now.

Q. There's just a big spotlight on Liam, given the position he plays, who proceeded him. How did he

grade out in the Vanderbilt game?

BRIAN KELLY: I don't have Coach Quinn's grades in front of me. I don't get them until about dinnertime. But I can tell you I already have my grades for the entire team.

He played well. I think there's a couple of things in pass protection that he continues to work on in terms of recognition. But his physicality was there in particular in the run game. His zone blocking was outstanding. He didn't pull as much. It seemed that Hainsey was on the front of those pulls.

I was really pleased with him. All five guys up front, obviously it was a much better effort from all five of those guys. They were much more physical.

Q. You talked about Tony Jones, how he had almost 20 touches, the best game statistically of his career. What did you see from him that made you think he deserved more touches and do you see him getting a lot of touches going forward?

BRIAN KELLY: It started last week in the Ball State game when he started to run with a demeanor and mindset that he wasn't going to be tackled. He carried that into practice.

We felt he was getting ready to be the kind of back that we had kind of been talking about, in the way he's run: physical, kind of being who we thought he needed to be. That's the way it certainly turned out this past weekend.

So if he runs physical, catches the ball coming out of the backfield, he's going to be a big asset, and he'll continue to be a big asset for us.

Q. You mentioned after the game the one thing that maybe bothered you most about the offense is maybe not repeating plays more often. After watching the tape, did you feel there were certain plays or areas of the game that needed to be emphasized more for your offense going forward?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, no, I think as I go through the game and take a look at it, what we have to be more focused on is execution. Maybe we have to be a little bit more cognizant of how we execute. Maybe at times we just come back to what we're doing well.

As I watched the game unfold here, watching it by breaking it down, if we're executing, we're difficult to stop. It's where we have poor execution. So I'm not backpedaling from what I said after the game. I'm kind of saying the same thing, that we could probably pare down what we're doing and just stick with some of the things we're executing, and I think we can be a better offense.

Q. I don't want to make any comparisons to 2012. That year you leaned a lot on the defense to carry the offense when it was finding its way. Used two quarterbacks back then, too. With Brandon, do you see him like an Everett role where you're looking for him to be more on the bus than to drive it, or do you want to see more from it?

BRIAN KELLY: I think he's capable of more. I think he's made great improvement. I think he's light-years ahead of where Everett was in 2012 in terms of what he can do running the football, and certainly in the passing game in terms of knowledge.

For me, this is more about the entire offense than maybe one position group. I think it's wide receivers and runningbacks, too, that are really young. Quite frankly, a couple of new offensive linemen. There's a lot of new pieces in this group.

I know the focus always goes back to the quarterback, but I think this offense really begins to click when all of the those pieces mature at the same time.

Thank you.