

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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Brian Kelly

BRIAN KELLY: Just brief comments on this past weekend. I told our team yesterday it was a satisfying win because it was one where our team went in and played against a faceless opponent in the sense that they knew that going in that physically they had an opponent that didn't have the same tools, and they did not let that affect the way they prepared all week and how they played the game.

It showed a great deal of maturity, a great deal of, in my estimation, accountability was the word that I used with them, accountability to a standard and the way that we want to play each and every week.

I was very proud of the way they played that game. It was, as a head coach, very satisfying.

That moves us now to how we do this on a consistent basis, week in and week out. A standard has been set, and our preparation now is absolutely crucial. Week in and week out, we know how to do it, and now it's applying that attention to the smallest details. We can't let go of the rope now. They know what they need to do on a day-to-day basis, and so it's my job really to make sure that those smallest of details are looked at on a day-to-day basis, so we prepare our football team to play up to that standard.

And this weekend with North Carolina, there are some similarities in the sense that if one would look at their record, you may get the similar sense that it's a 1-4 football team, and it is. But four of the five games they've had a lead going into the fourth quarter. If you watch their film last week against Georgia Tech, that's a battle going late into the game. It's 7-0, and they are playing hard and physical. Coach Fedora has got this football team -- the morale is good. They are playing hard. So we're going to have a great challenge on our hands.

So looking at who they are on film, looking at the athleticism that they have, the production is one where we'll have to play up to our standards that we have set, and that's the most important thing, not looking at anything else but the film and how they've played their opponents over the past five weeks, and again, there's some really good athletes on this football team.

Coach Fedora has done a great job of keeping this

team mentally locked in regardless of what group he puts out there week in and week out. It's been very, very impressive. We've got to go back out on the road, play another road game, and be challenged again by an ACC opponent, which we're looking forward to.

With that, I'll open it up to questions.

Q. How's the health of Brandon Wimbush going into this week?

BRIAN KELLY: You know, I think we'll take it day-to-day right now. He experienced some foot soreness after the game, so we put him in a walking boot, which is fairly typical relative to procedures. We had an MRI and an X-ray both came back clean, no structural damage, no ligament damage. We just want to be really cautious with him, and we'll begin the process of practicing and see how he progresses during the week.

Q. And not to be nit-picky, but do you know which foot it is?

BRIAN KELLY: It is his -- I believe it's his right foot.

Q. If Ian has to start, you've had some good success with guys stepping into that situation. What would be kind of the keys that you look for to get somebody ready for that kind of thing?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, and I think you guys know me pretty good. We're a 6/4 rep split operation, so he's been getting a lot of work through camp, through the season. He's got a lot of meaningful reps. This is not an NFL operation where the starting quarterback gets all the work. It's a 60/40 split of reps. He's gotten quite a bit of work leading up to this point. So we'll see where Brandon is, whether that changes or not. We'll get a look at it today. But if we've got to increase his reps, that would be the first thing that we would do.

Q. I think the last time you played North Carolina, they ran 84 plays --

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah.

Q. -- and I think their numbers are down a little bit this year because they played Georgia Tech. You were kind of adamant that you would need four safeties, and you talked a little bit about Studstill. What's his progress been like? It seemed like he kind of fell off, and now it seems like he's kind of surging again for you.

BRIAN KELLY: Well, I don't know if he fell off as much as -- I think it's a process of learning what we want done on a day-to-day basis, and each week we're going to reward guys that give us the right traits. He had a great week. We wanted to protect him. He had a strain, a foot strain, as well, last week, and we felt like if we could protect him for this week, we would try to do that, and we were able to do it.

It just requires a lot, you know, when you're playing with that pace and tempo, to play more than just two safeties, and somebody with as much experience as he has, we thought he would be a crucial piece moving into this week. That's why we wanted to make sure.

I don't know if he's up and down as much as fitting game plan and just really -- the structure of the defense was different last year to this year, and really giving Coach Elko what he wants, and I think Devin has really done a nice job there.

Q. Obviously the tragedy in Vegas, you've got some kids on your team from there. To your knowledge is everybody okay with their families?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, yeah, they both obviously have had some friends that have been touched by it in some fashion. I can't give you the specifics or particulars, but both of them were obviously -- and we all are obviously devastated by the news and sick about it. But both of them, Nicco and Alizé, were quite sullen yesterday because they knew of somebody that they were close to or were acquaintances that were affected by the tragedy.

Q. Do you expect Brandon to practice today or do you have to wait and see about 4:00?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, he's going to come back in, and we took the crutches from him. He's in a walking boot. Walking boots don't need crutches. It's his first injury. We'll work through the process with him. We're not going to push him really hard today. I think we'll get him probably moving a little bit, throwing, making sure that -- but I'm not in a position where we need to have him practice today. My vision would be more towards getting him out there Wednesday for practice.

Q. Did the injury happen in the game?

BRIAN KELLY: It did.

Q. At what point did he get the foot injury?

BRIAN KELLY: Specifically, we don't know exactly when it happened. But it's pretty common. That's why we have a check-in at noontime on Sundays. We get a lot of soft tissue injuries that don't show themselves right after the game and will show themselves later after a period of time. That's why we have a mandatory noon check-in, and at the mandatory noon

check-in -- he actually started feeling it that evening, and that evening he started to feel it, was out and then went home because he felt the foot starting to flare up on him.

Q. And then I was just curious in terms of we've asked you a ton about red zone and the efficiency being way up. A couple of the players when we ask them, they all start with play calling. How different is the play calling down there from the passes beyond just run the ball more?

BRIAN KELLY: I think it has a lot to do with the running of the football and then what we're setting up off of the run, more so than trying to take shots on 1st down in the end zone. We're staying ahead of the chains down there. We're leveraging our calls down there through the run game is the best way that I would put it to you, and that leveraging is allowing us to do other things other than trying to attack the front pylon, the back pylon, and the back of the end line.

Q. This is changing gears entirely, but Bill Rees, the impact that he's had in the recruiting department, maybe the ability to evaluate prospects during their senior year to see who's improved, who needs another look, can you speak on that a little bit?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think he's been invaluable in his ability to go through those players that are emerging late, those kind of guys that break late for you, and I don't know that we've ever had as many guys that we've been able to find this late in the process that are really the right fit for us, as well as really dive deep into the sophomore group and have us ahead of the game moving forward.

Q. I kind of want to follow up on something. With so much going on in the world, all the turbulent times, when you guys are in here as a team in this building, is it all football all the time or do you take time to address some of the current events and those types of things?

BRIAN KELLY: I think that there is a little bit of current events going on, whether it's here or whether it's segmented out. I'll address our staff and our coordinators. I meet with them a couple of times earlier in the week, and if there are issues that need to be brought up, they may not be brought up in the entire team structure but could be brought up within the position groups, and I like to address those as the first thing before we get into the meetings, so it's probably more common than uncommon that we address certain current event situations that are occurring. And then generally after practice, if there are current event situations, I'll hit those, as well.

Q. Along the same lines then with all the National

Anthem and that type of thing, if the guys did want to make a stand, where do you stand on that? Does it have to be a united front, or is it off limits? Are there certain guidelines that the guys can use their stage and the position they're in to sort of -- I don't want to say protest, I don't like that word, but kind of make a stand about something?

BRIAN KELLY: I think I was asked a similar question the other day. You know, it's -- we're in a college environment, a college setting, and we want our young men to be free thinkers and have the ability to voice their opinions. That's what college is about. But we're in a team structure, as well, and so we have to be able to get together -- if we had that current situation that they have in the NFL, which we currently don't, and we'd have to have a conversation about how we would move forward.

As a football coach who's working in a team, you know, not with individuals, we would obviously prefer to do something if we were to do something as a team, and I think that that's the difficult part when we get into team structure.

All the other stuff is really, for me -- becomes an issue of the flag and politics, and I really have had very little time to delve into all of those issues. If I had to, I probably would sit down, but in talking to my leadership group, it's not something that we've had to sit down and discuss.

Q. In talking to Greer Martini, he was saying when he named your captains that you gave everybody a very specific platform that you wanted the guys to work from, to kind of build within the team and kind of bolster their spot as a captain. What did he mean by that? What did he mean by a platform?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, I had them take a personality trait test to see what their strengths, their personality strengths were, and what those strengths were as individuals, we then went to work on using those strengths as the foundation for their leadership.

And so as we began in January to develop their leadership skills, it was where we started from, and it gave them a sense of this is who I am, these are my strengths, and I'm going to lead from these strengths.

You know, Greer had listed, as we took our strength test and personality strength test, you know, he had service, he had spirituality, he had a number of different things, so we would then sit down and talk about which ones he felt comfortable moving forward with, and then that's how we want to operate.

Q. As it relates to Brandon Wimbush's development as a quarterback, how do you balance

winning, obviously, which is first priority, and the stuff that he handles best in the passing game with trying to make improvements in areas of the game and the passing routes that he has struggled with, what you'll need as you progress throughout the season?

BRIAN KELLY: I think what's most important is his ability to lead, first and foremost. Does he clearly communicate? Does he have the trust of the other 10 players? Is he a great competitor? Does he have all the other traits? And he's got grit. He's got competitiveness. If you look at the BC where he wasn't throwing the ball very well, he found a way to win.

So we have a winner that's at that position, so we will go with what we need to do to make it work for Brandon until he develops the balance necessary within the offensive scheme of things. It's just a matter of time.

And so it's easier for us to adjust to him than him adjust to us, because he's got all those other traits. He's a winner. So once you know and establish that you've got a winner at that position, it's much easier for us to adjust to him and give him the time to continue to grow.

Q. And his demeanor and how he takes coaching when he does struggle with certain aspects of the passing game?

BRIAN KELLY: I think he's been really good. I mean, he's like anybody else, he's so competitive. He gets down on himself, and we have to keep him positive and keep telling him that he's capable of doing the things necessary.

You know, all I've told him is that we're with you. I was a pretty bad coach last year, and people stuck with me, and I'm sticking with you. So we're in this together.

So it's just -- you know, we're going to see this through. He's going to get better each and every week in some fashion, and I just think that there's going to be better days ahead for him.

Q. And then a technique question regarding cornerback play: What do you teach in terms of what it is okay for -- what are some of the telltale signs a corner needs to read with the receiver as to when he can then turn and make a play on the ball?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, it depends if he's in press or if he's in off man. If he's in press and he doesn't get a good collision and he gets beat off the line of scrimmage, he can't turn back for the ball, so he's got to play through the receiver and break through the basket. If he's an off man, we want to stay on top of the man at all times. We want to stay on top. That's why we're playing in off situations. So it really depends

if you're an off quarters, off man, or press. Of course if we're in press, we expect that we get a good reroute and we're able to disrupt the route and be in a great position that we can do what we need to do. So it's winning at the line in press or staying on top and playing the ball in the air, and in those instances, that's would be the correct technique. In phase versus out of phase would allow you to play the ball and see the ball versus you have to play through the receiver.

Q. So when it is covered well and he is in phase --
BRIAN KELLY: He can certainly play the ball, absolutely.

Q. Are there some telltale signs that the receiver gives you that it's okay to turn now? Certainly the back-shoulder throw makes it extremely difficult.
BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, unless you're playing the back-shoulder throw, if that's what you're playing. And in some areas we will have a call, in some short-field areas we will play a back-shoulder throw and force an over-the-top throw. He's just looking at eyes, eyes and hands, and he'll turn when his eyes light up, we're coming and turning for the football.

Q. Jonathan Bonner, what areas has he improved, and where do you still see him needing progress?
BRIAN KELLY: Football instincts, just sensing and feeling more -- he's explosive, powerful, understands the system of defense in terms of what he needs to play a lot better. Sometimes he loses himself a little bit in terms of where he is on the field. Just that kinesthetic awareness of playing off blocks and into gaps once in a while, but he's made great, great strides. He's playing pretty good football.

Q. And I think DJ Morgan was probably off our radar, but he was in there on a 3rd and 17, he was in there on a 4th and 6.
BRIAN KELLY: Really, really smart, smart football player, trust him. You know, he's got to continue to work on his strength and speed, things of that nature, but very smart, can really run our defense.

When we put him out on the field, we trust him.

Q. To this point, what have you liked about what you've gotten from your defensive line in your 3rd down package, and is any of that production and pressure they've been able to get, is that what you expected coming into the year, or has that been maybe a surprise along the way?

BRIAN KELLY: You know, I think I've been the guy that's been ringing that bell from day one about expecting that our defensive line was going to play better than many thought. Mike Elston has done a great job with that group, there's no question, hands,

hands up, deflecting, contesting it at the line of scrimmage, in quick gain, and then pushing the pocket inside and out. We're getting sacks, we're getting hurries. We're making it very difficult for quarterbacks to just sit back there and throw the football. They're contested from the pocket.

You know, Jerry Tillery inside is doing a great job. When we move Trumbo inside in that three-down package, he's doing a great job. He doesn't get a lot of credit, but he's getting real good pushes. Julian Okwara was a menace at times knocking people around, maybe not getting to the quarterback for a sack, but he took a tackle back, knocked him back into the running back. I mean, we're getting really good play. Khalid Kareem comes in and is very effective.

Again, it's the pressures, it's the deflections, it's the sacks. Didn't have those last year, and we're getting them this year.

Q. Would you list Brandon as probable, questionable for Saturday?

BRIAN KELLY: I'll know a little bit better today. Today, I don't expect him to have to go out and practice on a Tuesday. I'll have a better sense and feel after today and going into tomorrow with what he can do. So it's really kind of early -- because we haven't been out on the field. Most teams practice on Monday and they get a sense for what somebody can do. We don't get on the field until today, so it's a little early to make that assessment. I'll have a better feel for it after tomorrow.

Q. There's speculation out there that he got injured while he was out for the evening. Rather than dancing around this, is it possible he was injured in a non-football activity?

BRIAN KELLY: Is it possible? Well, I'd talk to anybody that has speculative information out there, and I trust what Brandon tells me. I have no reason not to trust 100 percent what Brandon tells me. He went out and felt his foot was not right, and he went home. That's what he told me. I believe him. I have no reason not to believe him based upon my relationship with him over the last three years.

Q. And then the TayCo ankle brace that Mike Bean created, is that something that he could use? Or because it's ankle rather than foot, not applicable in this situation?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, the TayCo was used last week with really good success for Tony Jones. It would be more of an ankle sprain functioning in the joint. This is not a joint situation, this is more soft tissue. It's really hard for us to give a -- we have no structural damage. We have a clean MRI, we have a clean X-ray. So we put him in a walking boot to be really, really

conservative in this instance, and we're going to take it off today to kind of see what we have. Rob Hunt, our trainer, couldn't give you a diagnosis really in terms of what it is until we get him moving and flexing.

So that brace, we wouldn't even touch it until we get a better sense of what we've got.

Q. How has that brace been helpful for you guys? You mentioned Tony Jones. How many guys have used it?

BRIAN KELLY: I couldn't give you the exact numbers, but it is a very popular choice for our players for stability. What it does more than anything else is it gets you back on the field moving. It's been -- it's been really amazing what that brace has been allowing our players to do quickly.

Normally with -- he had a high-ankle sprain and came back -- again, he was not 100 percent last week, but I've seen ankle sprains, high-ankle sprains that are four weeks, and he practiced pretty hard last week with that brace on, and that's the first time I've seen something like that before.

Q. Adams, I know he's had some issues with ankles, so has he used that at all?

BRIAN KELLY: No, it hasn't been at that level. He's just got a bit of a cranky ankle, and we've just tried to be as cautious with him as possible.

Q. Given where Brandon is at with his knowledge of the offense and everything else at this point in the year, how much practice could he miss this week and still play on Saturday in your opinion?

BRIAN KELLY: I think he could miss -- he could miss Tuesday. I think he would need to do something on Wednesday. But does he need to take 60 percent of the reps? Probably not. So I'm not in a rush to judge here where he's going to be. I think we're still pretty optimistic that he's going to be able to do something. So we'll see. Again, it's early in the week for us. I know it's a little later for you guys because this is the only time you'll see me until Thursday, but we haven't even gotten him out of the boot to move him around yet.

Q. If he can't do much Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, but come Friday night and Saturday he feels better, would he potentially play?

BRIAN KELLY: Because of the injury and how we have really examined the foot thoroughly with an MRI, a quick MRI turnaround, and an X-ray, this is really just about feeling good, because we know we've done our due diligence here. But we want to -- obviously we want to make him obviously feel good, and he's got to feel comfortable, and a lot of this is not just medical.

This has got to be he's got to feel comfortable and he's got to feel 100 percent like he can put his foot in the ground and do the things that he can do. And so this will be a decision that we'll have to make together.

Q. Because there's a bye next week, does that allow him to play a little less than 100 percent because he's got more recovery time?

BRIAN KELLY: I think we'll examine all of those. He wants to play. He's a competitor. We've seen how competitive the young man is. We'll examine all of those possibilities.

Q. You've played Boston College already, but you're getting into kind of your ACC stretch now, three of your next four games against ACC teams. With the exception of Georgia Tech who have got their own identity, have you noticed in the last couple of years, is there an ACC style of play? Are there some traits that stand out to you when you play these teams that carry over one from the next?

BRIAN KELLY: You know, it's been kind of different for us. I mean, I think when we watch film of the opponents of the last couple years, Boston College was a physical team with really good defensive players. Then you look at North Carolina State, really good defensive players, and North Carolina with great offensive players. It's really been -- it's been interesting because of the high-end caliber athletes on both sides of the ball, to the level of as good as anybody in the country.

So I'm not here to wave the flag for the ACC, but we see them all. We see the Pac-12, the Big Ten and Big 12, and the talent level is outstanding in the ACC.

Q. Going over your first month, all of your wins have been by three touchdowns, your one loss was by a point to arguably one of the best teams in the country. At this stage of the season how satisfied are you with what your team has done and the position you're in?

BRIAN KELLY: I'm satisfied with our preparation and the mindset that we have taken on Saturdays, when our performance is graded. And it's obviously very important on Saturdays.

Preparation is one thing, but performance is really what this is all about, and that total preparation has been able to give our guys the opportunity for the kind of high-performance necessary to win football games at this level. So I'm very pleased with all of that.

There are a number of things that I've got to do a better job with and continue to work on, and that's why we've got a ways to go. I don't want to say a long way to go, but we've got a ways to go as a football team and as a

coaching staff.