

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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Brian Kelly

Press Conference



Notre Dame 52, South Florida 0

BRIAN KELLY: Really proud of our football team and the way they responded this week in terms of getting off to a quick start. That was our point of emphasis, and doing so really put South Florida on their heels, scoring four out of the first five possessions. Defensively, taking away the run -- any time you shout anybody out in college football, something to really be excited about.

Also excited about the consistency that this team and these seniors in particular have shown, their 20th consecutive home win which sets the modern-day record, which very proud of our guys and what they have been able to accomplish, the consistency to do that just says so much about them and their work ethic and what they do on a day-to-day basis. Really good things.

Yeah, there's always going to be things that you want to look at to get better. We're going to have to get better in some areas, but really a day to feel great about seeing a lot of young players play and step up and they were asked to do that. Really, for me, satisfying to see a lot of young faces out there making plays.

So with that, I'm ready for your questions.

Q. You had three guys make emergency starts in (Jack) Kiser, (Clarence) Lewis and (Houston) Griffith. Those three guys ended up leading you in tackles today. Does that speak to the depth of this defense?

BRIAN KELLY: Certainly does. You know and we obviously had in our minds those were guys that we felt all along when we came to camp that we wanted to get ready and felt would be down the road guys that we would need to count on. They all stepped up and I feel good with them on the field.

Jack Kiser was given the game ball for his play, and the reaction in the locker room, you know, was pretty impressive in terms of -- I think everybody was excited when he got the game ball.

Q. What was the timing of learning you had some players unavailable, and while not ideal, it's not unexpected. How do you feel your staff and team responded to this situation late in the week?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think we live in this world where right now, you're never prepared for it but we are aware of it and we know it could happen. I think our players responded well. Our coaches were prepared and they responded well. You hate to see anybody not be available, but it's the reality that we live in and our guys did a great job. And it's why we've prepared, you know, so deep in the ranks in terms of giving guys reps and opportunities to be prepared.

You know, I know it's cliché-ish, but it's next-man-in mentality that we have built and we trust our guys and they trust us, and we know that their preparation is going to be such that they are going to be ready to play.

Q. Did anyone change your perception of what they might be able to do and contribute long term?

BRIAN KELLY: No, I don't know, change. I think that we'll evaluate the film and I think probably more guys confirmed. You saw four backs that all contributed in a very positive way from C'Bo Flemister to Chris Tyree, obviously Kyren (Williams) and Jafar (Armstrong). All of them did great things.

You know, defensive backfield, we played a lot of corners. Alex Ehrensberger was on scout team playing nose guard for us and he's playing five technique and doing -- got a sack, doing great things.

I just think that we've got really good players and we've got really good depth and they will accept the roles that we give them during the week and then they will be prepared to play if we call on them.

Q. When did you find out how many players and who you would be missing today?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, it's an ongoing process. You just kind of, you know, during the week or 2:00 in the morning or 12:50 before kickoff, you just kind of roll with it, you know.



We're prepared. We're ready. You never want to lose any guys. But I think we are a strong group mentally. We feel for those guys that miss out on this opportunity because they put in so much time, so much effort. I'm sick about losing any player that has committed so much time and effort to the cause and their commitment to Notre Dame Football.

But I'm also so excited when I get to see a Jack Lamb who might have been a couple of days from thinking about, he may never play again, and now he's out there playing and there's a smile on his face.

So where there's unfortunate circumstances, there's great opportunities. That's kind of how we look at it, right. We don't look at it as there's a great amount of pressure, but there's great privilege to be, for me, the head coach at Notre Dame and players at Notre Dame. We look at it as not adversity but as opportunity. It's really just the way you look at it, and that's how we choose to look at it.

Q. Why was Jack Kiser able to have so much success stepping in at the buck linebacker role?

BRIAN KELLY: He's well-coached. He's a great student. He was on scout team Tuesday and Wednesday, split his time going back and forth. He's just smart. He does extra work to prepare. He's a remarkable young man that, you know, can help our offense get prepared for South Florida's defense and then put himself in a position where he can lead our team in tackles.

I was kidding Clark (Lea). I was like, what are you doing? Why hasn't he been starting all year? You know, tongue-in-cheek. But he's prepared himself very well.

Q. How close to he was to Shane Simon and Marist Liufau in preseason competition at that position?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, they were all very, very good players. We feel like, you know, all of them can contribute and obviously they did. Again, I don't think that's going to change. Shane's (Simon) coming back. He'll be back, and Shane will play for us.

Marist (Liufau) will be back and he'll play for us. Jack will play for us, both Jacks. We're blessed that we have those kind of players, and we'll find roles for them and they will excel at the buck position, and special teams. We pulled some of their special teams responsibilities off, and that's why we were pretty efficient in the special teams because we have guys like that on it, as well.

Q. Can you discuss the contributions Tommy Trimble and the tight ends gave you in the run game today?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, they are integral. When you talk about the offensive line, and they were really good today, and I thought that they continued where they left off in the third and fourth quarter last week, you know, picking up movement. We are starting to get our aiming points down pretty good on the outside zone and our inside punch play, and then once teams start over-committing to that, then you can see how clean the counters look and the misdirection plays.

But the tight ends were integral as you can see by our formation sets. We are in 12- and 13-personnel groupings. So Tremble and Brock and Mike Mayer, and even George Takacs. Bauman is not playing a lot but he's going to play. We are really deep there and those guys are huge contributors to what we are doing at that position and running the football.

Q. We didn't see a lot of Ian Book, but from what we did, do you feel like you saw the steps forward that you would like and how did Drew Pyne do from your perspective?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, Ian was better today. I thought he managed our offense very well. He's not a manager, but he managed the things that we asked him to do. He got us off to a good start with some good completions down the field.

There are a couple balls I thought in the red zone that, you know, he could have been a little bit more finessed with, but all in all it was a really good performance. I thought he led our team to the kind of fast start that we wanted. He was really tuned in. I thought he had a great week of practice. Really liked his demeanor. Really worked on his pocket presence. I liked his calmness in the pocket. It was a really good progression from where he was last week.

Yeah, and Drew is out there to eat clock. We gave him a couple of tough looks in the passing game where he didn't have much of a look there in terms of being able to throw it, but we really like Drew, and he'll be fine. He's smart. He works hard in all of the meetings, and he's always well prepared.

Q. Could you comment on Clarence Lewis and what you saw from him specifically in his first career start?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, obviously you can see he's not hurried. His movements are very fluid. Plays the ball very well. His timing is excellent. He's got all of the tools and the traits that you want in an outstanding corner.

You know, I just think that he's got a really bright future.

We feel good with him out there on the field. And you know, he's -- I think there were a couple of times where we might have wanted him to tighten up his coverage a little bit to the field and you know, I think Mike talked to him a couple times about his ankle on tackling.

But he's a smooth player and a very confident player.

Q. Is this experience even more valuable for the young guys given the lack of a spring camp and an atypical fall camp?

BRIAN KELLY: Oh, absolutely. No doubt. To get them in the game like this where they certainly got reps in camp, but you're still also trying to make up reps for your first team.

We were on a pitch count in the sense that we didn't want to have too much one-on-one contact during preseason camp, so we didn't get quite as many live reps as we have had in the past. So that means the trickle-down is the twos didn't get as many, either.

Yeah, this was a great game to get those reps in for the twos and sharpen their toolbox, so to speak.

Q. How much do you allow yourself to look at a game like this and think about how stable the program is compared to where it was at the start of your tenure?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, for varying reasons, I don't spend much time on that. But now that you've asked the question, you know, we're certainly much further along. When I took over the program, the program was not winning. It is now a winning program. We just talked about 20 consecutive wins at home.

I think South Florida is in a similar situation. So it's hard to compare, right. They are on some hard times. You know, that's why there's a new coach there. So it's really hard to compare apples-to-apples from that standpoint.

We just kind of look at where we are and the consistency that we've built more so than anything else, and they have got a good coach. They have got good coaches. It's a great recruiting area. I'm sure that South Florida is going to be a team to be reckoned with in their conference in the not-too-distant future.

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