An Interview With:

COACH KELLY

COACH KELLY: On to Ireland, it’s going to be a long day for our players. It's purposeful in the sense that we want to get them up early. We want to keep them moving through the entire day so that they sleep on the flight over to Ireland. We'll get up Thursday, go to the hotel breakfast and get into a routine relative to practice and get them early in bed Thursday, Friday, and now we can be adjusted to the time difference. Go through our normal walk-through on Friday and play the game on Saturday.

Tomorrow is a pretty important day for us relative to getting acclimated to the change. Again, from my standpoint, we've got a great support staff. They have been able to handle all the logistics of the trip. We met today. We had our 48-hour meeting to go over the specifics. And everything is really tight and we're a lot more at ease knowing that all of the things that have been covered, traveling over 100 players to Ireland.

Exciting day yesterday, we named our captains, four captains that represent all of the standards that I want here at Notre Dame for our players: Tyler Eifert, Zack Martin on offense, Kapron Lewis-Moore on defense as well as Manti Te'o. I think what struck me more than anything else is when they got out before their teammates, the things that they said about being a captain at Notre Dame and knowing in one particular instance with Kap Lewis that he was brought to tears. You would love to see the passion and the love for Notre Dame and the teammates, and they have great representatives.

I will also add that there are a number of other seniors that easily could have been in that position of being a captain. And I think that's what I'm most excited about is we have got great leadership, not only amongst our seniors, but our veteran football players, and it's set a great model for our younger players to follow.

So this week, again, preparation for Navy, as you know, very difficult opponent to play, especially in your opener, but any time. Ken Niumatalolo, great coach, obviously does as well as anybody in the country at taking his talent and getting it to execute on both sides of the ball, and they have shown that they can do that week-in and week-out.

Again, an offense that has an experienced quarterback, Gee Gee Greene, and an outstanding squad. He makes their offense have that ability to get on the perimeter, and you know, very solid scheme defensively.

So it's going to be a great opportunity for us. I'm excited to see our football team play. We have got a first-time starter at quarterback. Going to see some young players at the perimeter replacing Michael Floyd, as well as some veteran players. We have some young players playing in the secondary, so it's going to be really an exciting game as the head coach watching these guys compete for the first time.

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Q. In terms of the new kicking rules, have you adjusted at all the way you practice?

COACH KELLY: I think what's adjusted more than anything else is there's really only two types of kicks, one is kicking out of the end zone, and one is trying to kick a ball that hangs so your coverage scheme can get down there.

But now with the encroachment rule being five yards, it changes the pace of your kickoff team getting down there a little bit.

Yeah, I think there has been some adjustments across the board and I know talking to other coaches, I don't know that that's always equaled out to less time but maybe more concentrated effort on one or two types of kicks.

Q. How long have you worked on contingency plans for Cierre Wood's absence?
COACH KELLY: I don't know that I've worked on contingency plans. We certainly went out every day, practiced. And when I made my decision to suspend Cierre and Justin Utupo, we then began to get more reps to other guys because he wasn't going to be playing. There wasn't a long time that we had a contingency plan because I didn't know what I was going to do relative to the rules violation.

Q. When did you learn there was a violation that you might have to address?

COACH KELLY: I don't want to get into the specifics of time and place. First, it probably wouldn't be accurate.

What's the most important thing is that any time I suspend somebody from the football team it's perceived as discipline, and I understand that. These are educational opportunities for me so when we suspend somebody, I look at it in terms of how are we going to get this young man to live up to the standards that I have for our program.

And in this instance, relative to the suspension, we want it to be educational and we want them to come back citizens and better young men.

Q. With the options at one or two, how do they feet in --

COACH KELLY: As you know, Theo certainly is a guy that has a lot of experience at the wide receiver position.

So you have somebody that is extremely effective at catching the football, so really, it's a guy that was bred for this position in terms of if you call it a hybrid or whatever you want to call it; running the ball is his first love and it's something that he's accustomed to through high school and his first year or so here. And we cross-trained him, so he fits terrifically right now.

George is making progress every day. He was strictly the tailback. He was, you know, in the eye and he was a guy that was getting the ball seven and a half yards deep, and now he's moving into different venues as a receiver. So he's continued to evolve in that position.

And Cam McDaniel is somebody that's very familiar with this position because he played in the spread offense and he was somebody that was very comfortable.

So I think two of them are very comfortable in the position they are right now and one is evolving in George.

Q. So you talk about the discipline -- is it also disappointing in any way, or do you look at it just as an opportunity to learn from a mistake? And then heading into a season, could you talk about just the pros and cons of going into a game or year and trying to use this as, you have to overcome something, you don't have a full roster of players; just that whole dynamic.

COACH KELLY: Yeah, that's a good question. I don't know if I think of it in terms of, we have to overcome adversity, as much as, you understand that as a head coach with 18- to 22-year-olds, that you hope that everybody makes good decisions all the time. I hope my son makes good decisions; my daughter.

But I think we all get disappointed but we also know that they are young and we want them to learn from the mistakes that they made. And in this instance, we are hoping that Cierre, Justin, I'm very confident that they will learn from their mistakes.

But I don't think it filters into the team that, oh, my goodness, somebody gets suspended, we have to overcome adversity. I think they see it more as if you don't live up to these standards, this is what's going to happen, let's keep moving forward. At least that's the sense that I get.

Q. Is Amir Carlisle available to play?

COACH KELLY: He is not available.

Q. The whole Dublin thing, new for the players and new for you, too; when in your mind did you mentally start preparing for the different week ahead?

COACH KELLY: First change will be tomorrow morning at 5:00 a.m. That literally will be the first change in terms of the preparation of our football team relative to going to Ireland to play the game. We have really kept a similar schedule in terms of our preparation, and really, the adjustments will start to take place tomorrow morning.

Q. With your newly named captains, how much do you lean on them moving forward to avoid or help prevent a situation like Cierre and Justin down the road? Is that something that you rely on the captains to do for you?
COACH KELLY: Not necessarily. I don’t think that necessarily comes with the job description as much as I expect all of our players to be diligent on pure accountability. It’s one of our cornerstones to our A Team, which is: You know what to do; let’s make sure that the others know what to do, as well.

So I don’t think it just comes with the captains. I think what comes with our captains is great representatives of our program, and not just vocal representatives in terms of media. But when they say something in the locker room, they are going to be heard, as well.

They are also a great opportunity for me to have communication with our leaders. Of course we have a unity council that helps to assist in that, as well. But I think they just represent all of the things that we want in our program and we can put them and push them out front.

Q. Since the suspension was your decision, was that in concert with the resident life, or did they render their own decision on top of it?

COACH KELLY: This is strictly an independent decision that I made relative to the decisions that those young men made. And they violated the rules that our players know; and the rules that they know every single day about being in this program.

Q. How has Everett responded in terms of body language, going to meetings, being around you?

COACH KELLY: I would say that he understands the role of being a leader in our quarterback position, which is one that more than anything, that quarterback kind of sets its own defense out there; and if he comes out there and he’s not full of energy and he’s not excited, that has a tendency to not filter through the ranks. And that's never been the case.

If he showed that at all during his audition, if you will, for the starting job, he wouldn’t get it, because we are not going to take somebody to be starting quarterback at Notre Dame. He's always had that; Andrew has that; Tommy's always had it, Gunner's going to have it; and so all of these guys understand the nuances as it relates to the position.

Q. Everett being a first-time starter, in your experience with first-time starters before, you mentioned that you have a game plan that's appropriate for a first-time starter. How about the way you deal with it during a game and the way you talk to them before a game, is there any difference with them?

COACH KELLY: I think it all goes to spending more time with them and I've spent more time with them than any time in the past five or six years. I've been to every single meeting. I felt like in answering your question that it was important that we had great communication. Especially on the sideline.

And so I've gone in a direction that I don't believe that that's going to be an issue on the sideline; that we'll be able to communicate effectively and move on to the next set of circumstances.

Q. Is Chuck upstairs or downstairs?

COACH KELLY: Chuck is in the box.

Q. You mentioned Amir's not going to be available Saturday -- is this something that might go long-term with him?

COACH KELLY: I don't think so, no, knock-on-wood. We are really encouraged; I think next week you'll maybe even get a chance to ask him because I'm very, very optimistic as we stand here right now that he may be close.

We want to be very careful with him. The fact of the matter is, he's a really good football player and we don't want to play him 80 percent. That's why we have been hesitant to get too far along but we have made really good progress.

Q. Can you talk about Kapron and how he responded to come back from a preseason injury, as well as competition from some pretty good young players.

COACH KELLY: Well, here's a couple things. You know, his room, that defensive line room, there's a lot of really interesting characters in that room. And he is the leader in that room. And so his ability to relate with all of the players are in that room, really to me, singularly, is the one trait that he has shown that has elevated him to this position of captain, because he's been able to manage all of those young personalities, veterans, he himself being a veteran; he's seen it. And I was really, really proud of the way he handled that room.

He's the leader in that room on the
defensive side of the ball. And I've seen that since January. This is not something that happened over the last two weeks. This is something that continues to evolve. And he really has taken hold of that room, and obviously got a great D-Line coach in there, too, with Coach Elston to focus strictly on the D-Line. But we have a really good dynamic in there.

Q. Following up on the Cierre and Justin situation, fans tend to keep a scorecard on who gets punished for what; you coming up on your decision, how difficult is that when you have to weigh in all of those other factors?

COACH KELLY: Oh, no, I have to weigh all the factors that are involved. Each one, to me, there's different circumstances in each one. I mean, the ultimate goal is we want them all to turn out like Michael Floyd's situation, where they make life decisions to change the way they are. And so the ultimate goal is to get, as I said earlier, with any kind of sanctions or any kind of suspensions, we want better citizens. We want more accountable citizens. We want people representing our program in the right way.

And so there is not a matrix, and I just kind of go down and go, okay, that equals, two. And I'm not trying to be a wise guy about it, but it just takes a lot of time to put all those things together to make those decisions.

Q. The offensive line, seems to get a lot of attention because it's a pretty secure area, and you've got some depth and versatility there. Can you give an overall, going into the season?

COACH KELLY: Well, any time you have four starters back on the offensive line; of course I consider Mike Golic to be a starter, although it was in center, he's starting at the right guard position, you can't underestimate those live snaps and having those live snaps under your belt when you open up.

So now you're looking at Christian Lombard who has been here now on his third season, he's experienced in the sense that he knows what to expect on a game day and he's made great improvement at that right tackle position.

So any time you've got a left side like Watt and Martin and Braxston Cave, arguably one of the better centers in the country, add Mike Golic to that, pretty strong offensive line; you feel good going into any game.

Q. When the announcement came out about -- sometimes when you have a quarterback that's deliberate, or overly deliberate, sometimes you have to hold your block a little bit more and you have to be a little bit more on target. With a quicker quarterback out there, can maybe miss step somebody -- those guys have to be pretty juiced having a guy back there that's that quick.

COACH KELLY: I've never asked them personally but I would say if I was the offensive lineman and you know that a guy can make something happen, that probably keeps your attention a little bit longer. Because, you know, he's got great escape-ability.

But he's one that is committed to the pocket and that's really one of the reasons why we went with him is that he wasn't a guy that was going to run out of the pocket at the first, you know, off-color jersey coming at him.

So in answering your question, I think on offensive line, knows his strengths. He's going to stay in the pocket, but he's got great escape-ability. If they just stay on their blocks, good things can happen.

Q. You have one of the top targets in the country with Tyler Eifert, and he was a beneficiary with Michael Floyd in the last year; is there anyone gaining separation in the receiving core that can maybe take some of the burden off Tyler this year?

COACH KELLY: You're going to need your media guide as it relates to the wide receiver position, because they are all playing. Each one of them right now has a different skill set.

Nobody is polished to the level where they are a stand-alone player at the receiving core other than Tyler. He's a stand-alone player. He can block in line, he can block in the perimeter and he can catch the ball deep. He can go over the middle and he can do all the things.

All of the other young men are resolving into specific roles and they will have important roles within our offense. So they are all going to play. You are all going to have to get familiar with all of their names because they are all going to be involved in our game plan.

So you also have veterans that are going
to get an opportunity: John Goodman, we know about Robby Toma; Danny Smith who has been with our program he's going to get an opportunity to play; Da'Varis Daniels, Chris Brown, Justin Ferguson, Davonte' Neal, and I've probably left out a couple others. They are all going to have to play collectively roles in our offense. So that answers the question.

Q. You're almost going to have like a six- or seven-man receiver -- continuity within the offense?

COACH KELLY: They will know what their role is; in other words, it's defined by what they are asked to do.

You know, we are not going to ask Chris Brown to come in and take over the game, you know what I mean. He's going to have a role. And all of those guys are understanding as we get further into our game planning; okay, I see what my role is going to be against Navy, and they are going to embrace their role and they are going to understand.

So we won't have an issue of misunderstanding what their role is. Continuity is a different question. We are just going to be rolling a lot of guys in there.

Q. Do you have McDaniel working exclusively on offense or is he still cross-training?

COACH KELLY: He's exclusively, right now, as we speak, on offense.

Q. Do you foresee needing a certain type of rotation also at the cornerback position, and also at receiver?

COACH KELLY: No, I don't think we need to see a rotation as much as we continue to develop, you know, some of our young, talented players. We think we have the ability, including KeiVarae Russell, who is going to be a starter. We are really high on Josh and Jalen and Elijah Shumate. And those guys we are really excited about; they are young players.

So we'll continue to develop them. We don't need to have a rotation in there. We think that we have a lot of players on offense that can contribute in roles, whereas the cornerback position is not necessarily a role-playing position.

Q. Has anyone emerged as the nickel or dime?

COACH KELLY: That's still a work-in-progress, because there's really very little nickel work this week. So that's still going to evolve next week.

Q. As it relates to Amir Carlisle, I know you have receivers playing running back, is he still running back first or is he getting a look and see?

COACH KELLY: No, he has to play both. If we assume just for the sake of the argument that the D-back, the one back, he can line up in that slot position. So he's got to be able to do both. He can't be just, I'm lining up and running back in that squall that I do.

All of those guys, including George, who probably arguably has the furthest ground to cover, and he's made great progress, they all have to be able to be cross-trained and Amir is going to be able to do that quite well once he's 100%.

Q. I know you originally planned to have morning practices last week as well as this week, probably five or six of them scheduled.

COACH KELLY: Yeah, I think we were going to start last week and then continue.

Q. Was it a matter of -- did you look at it, it was going to be diminishing returns?

COACH KELLY: You're right, I think as I thought about it more and got a feel for our team in terms of where they are, preparation-wise, physically, you know, college students have a tendency to cut back on sleep more than anything else, and I didn't want to be the person that adds to that and let it possibly affect us later in the year.

So I changed gears on that, and that was just the feel of our team. If I felt like we needed to do it, we were a team that didn't have a lot of, you know, upper classmen that understand getting up and getting their work done; I may have gone a different route. But it was a feel for me more than anything else.

Q. And how concerned are you that you're playing probably the team in the country that's best equipped to play a game early in the morning since they hit the ground running every day?

COACH KELLY: Yeah, they won't be late for the game, I know that. It's certainly -- and I
think I said this earlier, I might have been more concerned if it was week four or five if you get into a pattern or a routine.

It’s the opener, my gosh. If you can’t be excited about the opener, I don’t know what we are doing here playing football. I really don’t think -- I think it’s going to be a non-issue.

Q. Just following up on the suspension, you said that the decision was yours and one that you made. I just wondered before you came to Notre Dame, would you have been more or less comfortable making that decision, or is it no different?

COACH KELLY: I don’t know that I would have been reticent to make decision. I probably would have checked to make sure that I could make the decision. I learned in my first year that there were some decisions that I can’t make. So I think that in all honesty, I probably would have checked around and made sure that I could make the decision. I was pretty clear after being in my third year that this was the decision that I could make.

Q. Does it almost help that you’re playing an offense -- he has not oriented so he can work out the first game jitters?

COACH KELLY: Yeah, that’s one way to look at it. But if you’re not disciplined, the ball goes over your head like that.

So kind of like, all right, what kind of kid do you have here, do you have this super athlete that can cover anybody man-to-man? Or do you have this kid that has great discipline and he’s going to read his keys?

So it just depends on how you want to look at that. We think he’s got the ability to do the job against Navy, a different job than it will be against Purdue, but we think he’s got that ability to do the job.

So, I don’t want to say pick your poison but they are so different in terms of the rolls that he’s going to be asked to be performing. We would not put him in this position if we didn’t think he would perform this roll.

Q. You mentioned the primary goal of a quarterback is not to make mistakes and a lot of people would think a first-time starter is prone --

COACH KELLY: He will make mistakes. Let’s make it clear; he will make mistakes.

I think if we really look carefully at the mistakes that we made, they were turnovers in the red zone. They were turnovers in the end zone. They were just -- they were heightened within the game. He’s going to make some mistakes, and we know that and we are going to have to obviously try to overcome those. But it’s those poor decisions that we have to eradicate -- I don’t know if you finished your question -- I jumped in, I’m sorry.

Q. How predictable or unpredictable is he going to be?

COACH KELLY: Well, we think -- I think, Coach Martin, our entire offensive staff, feels as though he’s disciplined in his approach; that he understands the routine of the quarterback position that he’s going to minimize the mistakes. Because he’s shown that over the past month. If he’s not out of character on Saturday, I will safely say, he will do a very good job of taking care of the football, because that’s why they play the game.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone. FastScripts by ASAP Sports...