

# University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

Saturday, April 22, 2017



## Brian Kelly

COACH KELLY: You know, we wanted to take all of our teaching and then, you know, begin the process of competing today, right. So you get 14 practices, you teach, you work on all of the things that coaches work on on a day-to-day basis, and then you want to see your team then flip a switch and go into a competitive mode.

So these spring games, you know, different programs and coaches take them differently. But for me, one thing that I've always wanted to do is create an atmosphere for competition: Guys locked in when they get into the building, really focused on a game-like atmosphere, because it's now no longer practice. They have got to do what they do as athletes; so their athleticism has to take over in a coordinated pattern with their teaching.

So that's the first thing that I was looking for. You know, I think there were a number of guys that understood that message. So that was accomplished today, just by playing the game itself, regardless of the score, regardless of who the playmakers were. Today was obviously for me, the next step in the process of, you know, total preparation of this football team.

The next is certainly, you know, guys that are continuing to, you know, work their traits. I think a lot of guys, for me out there today, did some things that continue to move us in the right direction, and we're not a finished product. We're not ready for a game yet. But we certainly did some things that when you look and assess where you are, we feel like we're making the progress necessary.

We'll take some time off now. We're in a discretionary week and guys will finish up with their exams. They will have some time off and then we'll get back at it in June, and continue to work towards our opener against Temple.

So with that, I'll open it to questions.

### **Q. Did you see anything out there today that surprised you or that you didn't see all spring that maybe popped out at you today?**

COACH KELLY: No, there wasn't anything that surprised me. I think we had a glimpse of everything. What I was looking for more than anything else was in

a competitive environment with a lot more snaps, was there consistency in some of the things that they were doing. And I thought that, you know, the evaluation process for me would be, did you see it more consistently on a more consistent basis more so did somebody surprise you. I don't think there was one guy out there that we said, we didn't know he was capable of this.

### **Q. Just your decision to be on the field, what you got from that today and also, as you exit spring, you know, probably new set of priorities, and what would those be?**

COACH KELLY: Being on the field for me gave me the opportunity to address anything that happened at the moment right there, right now.

And some issues that can be avoided relative to, you know, when you've got a red jersey quarterback out there, you want to be the intermediary in making sure that the ball is spotted in the right location and we don't have anybody in harm's way. Part of it is traffic cop, but more importantly, it was just for me to be in the middle of the action.

So I'll give you an example. In our tempo, we were flipping the ball out to the side judge instead of the umpire, which is a savings of maybe two to three seconds. And so little things like that, where I can be on top of them and make those corrections immediately, so when a player gets up, he's not flipping it out to a side judge, so then he's got to take the ball back inside. You know, give it to the umpire, give it to the center judge. Just little things like that. Just trying to help them with nuances from play-to-play.

There really isn't a next stage as much as, we'll go back into our training. So the physical training will continue. But through that physical training, you know, obviously fatigue, stress, grit, how we handle all those things through our training, is going to be building the kind of football players that we want; that can handle what goes on in the fourth quarter and finish strong, doing those things. And that will be part of the next part of our, you know, total preparation for our team.

### **Q. In the next stage, though, for the coaching staff**

--

COACH KELLY: On the road.

**Q. Okay. On the road. Not tweaking schemes; not plugging in freshmen. It's recruiting?**

COACH KELLY: Oh, no. No, no. We'll hit the road immediately, recruit and rally back here mid-May, assess our recruiting with a couple staff meetings. Finish up, come back here in June and we'll have some OTAs with our guys, some time with our players in June and our camps, and that will be pretty much the next couple months.

**Q. From day one of the spring till now, where have you seen the most progress and what still needs to be done? You mentioned work still needed to be done.**

COACH KELLY: Oh, you know, just building good habits on a day-to-day basis is probably the most important thing, you know, in everything that we do. We'll continue to work on that process and that's -- the great thing about it is, you know, a lot of this is hard for our guys. You know, it's delayed gratification. They want it right now. And you can't get it right now. It takes time to build all those.

They are becoming quite aware that this is something they have to work on every day. Today was just another step towards that. Again, as I said to Eric, then we come back and they get back in the weight room and we keep building those habits. We keep building those good habits; are going to lead to good things on the field.

**Q. With Brandon somewhat struggling today, how much do you attribute that to the fact that he wasn't live and therefore, some of those sacks that he took are probably plays that he could make live?**

COACH KELLY: Yeah, I don't know, characterizing struggling -- I mean, he's learning our offense. He's learning the reads. He's, again, a freshman quarterback. He's, again, I think every snap that he takes, gets him closer to prepared for where we want him. I don't think we rate him as struggling versus playing superior football, as much as this is just the learning process for him; that he continues to learn every single day.

So I loved everything that happened to him today. It's how you take it, right. He's just wide-eyed, listening, paying attention and just totally committed to the process of getting better. And that's really what I think about more so than, you know, trying to label whether they played really well or they didn't play really well.

**Q. And then from your defense, did you like what you saw from the first team today? It seemed like improvement is already showing there.**

COACH KELLY: Well, I like the fundamentals showing

up, right. You know, the ability to spill the ball into the right locations. You know, being in good position. You know, we got the ball thrown over our heads a couple times. We're not -- you know, we're not there yet, but there were some really good signs in terms of, in particular, physical play.

And I don't know if you guys look at it, but that was a more confident group. They played with an expectation to make plays. They were not a group where they were expecting bad things to happen to them and that's a big confidence step for our guys.

**Q. Obviously a lot of new things going on within the stadium. So what excites you most as you head into this season and the potential for the atmosphere that you're going to have in that stadium?**

COACH KELLY: Well, I think, you know, all of the renovations look tremendous. Particularly the north end zone, what they have done down there, it's going to be a great feel for us to come out of that tunnel the way it's put together, the new locker room obviously gives you a great feel.

But as I told our guys, there has to be a great sense of pride when you walk into that stadium and that pride has to carry over in your preparation and being focused and locked in every time we come into the stadium. It's a stadium that is rich in tradition and our guys need to know that they play football at the University of Notre Dame and it's just a great, great thing that they have and appreciate it.

Now, as I told them after, that we want to play a certain style, and we don't ever want to give football games away. We feel that, you know, our process and preparation should put us in a position where we don't give games away.

**Q. You talked about sort of building habits. How close are those habits to being habits, where guys just do it?**

COACH KELLY: We're not there yet. I mean, I think we have some guys that are further along than others, but you know, this is collectively as a group that we have to work on every single day. It will be something that's talked about from today through the summer, all season, and it won't go away. And we won't -- I don't think it's not really a destination as much as it's a journey every single day.

So I think our guys understand that it takes time to build those habits, because some of them have bad habits, and too, to get rid of those bad habits, you really have to be creating good habits over a long period of time. And so that's the process that is hard for these

guys, because it takes time and they want it to happen right away.

So sometimes they forget and they just want to go out and play. And if you go out and play, but you don't do it the right way, it's going to get you beat. So that's really the challenge.

**Q. Could you give us sort of a small picture example of a good habit taking root that you've seen over the last month and a half that makes you feel optimistic that things are really starting to --**

COACH KELLY: Well, I think if we ask our guys to do a number of different things on a day-to-day basis and so first of all, understanding how habits carry over to what they do in the classroom and what they do on the football field. Not jumping off side, being disciplined, watching the football, locking in, doing the things that, you know, we're asking you to do. Habits occur when it's over and over and over again done the right way.

So I think it's awareness. It starts with guys being aware of it first. And then once they are aware that they need to have these good habits to be good football players, then you start to see it show itself in good run support angles, and you see it in offensively, guys always lined up properly. You know, we had very few penalties today and that's a product of some of the habits that are being built on a day-to-day basis.

**Q. Lastly, the match of Drue Tranquill at the rover position, I don't know if he's been as productive in every practice that he's played there as he was today, but how good of a fit can that be for your defense?**

COACH KELLY: It's been a good fit all spring. He's a plus player there for us. He really can impact what's happening from snap to snap. He's a physical player and playing low to the ball is really where he can do a lot of really good things for us.

**Q. What did you see from Ian Book today?**

COACH KELLY: What we've seen all spring: Consistency, throws strikes, rarely misses an open receiver, can see the field very well. Runs the offense very well. I mean, I think, you know, we all came into the spring talking about Brandon Wimbush and rightly so. The starting quarterback at Notre Dame is a big topic. It's a big story.

But the story beneath the story for me was: Who the heck is going to be the No. 2 quarterback. Because if you guys have followed us long enough, we've used our No. 2 here, quite a bit.

So having that No. 2, and seeing him perform the way he has this spring, for me, has been, you know, one of

the big stories. And Ian has done this all spring.

So I think Eric asked me, was there any surprises. I think you could point to his performance today and say it was a surprise; it wasn't a surprise to me. He's shown that. I thought he would go out and play really well. I'm glad he did.

**Q. Safe to say there is no quarterback controversy going into the fall?**

COACH KELLY: No, there's no quarterback controversy.

**Q. Other players that positively reinforced what you saw as positive play throughout the spring?**

COACH KELLY: I think the tight ends collectively, inline blocking, catching the football, running with physicality, all three running backs, great depth at the running back position. I think each one of them showed you what they are capable of doing.

The offensive line, in particular, the first group, you know, starting with all of the blue guys, the blue team, all are very, very good players for us. You know, Tommy is still learning but can hold his own in there on a play-to-play basis. I think defensively, Julian Love is a short tackler for us. I think it's pretty clear that Daelin Hayes is going to be around the football and be a disruptive player for us.

And I think, you know, again, I'd have to watch the film, but it seemed like Julian Okwara was a hard guy to block coming off the edge, as well. Those were the positives.

**Q. I know the quarterbacks were in red jerseys and there was a quick whistle, but concerns about pass pro at all?**

COACH KELLY: No, not really. I mean, a lot of the stuff, we're not really preparing to pick up and block particular fronts and schemes.

So when we get into game planning, we'll pick up everything. There's some things that we've got to do better, no question, and pick up some looks. We missed one with a back. We should have slid the protection another time. But those don't concern me as much as just good technique on our offensive line on a play-to-play basis.

**Q. On lesser note I guess, but Kohler, your kicker, your walk-on kicker looks competent.**

COACH KELLY: Yeah, I think I mentioned him here the other day, and you guys kind of snickered at me. He's solid.

**Q. Polian praised him a couple of weeks ago.**

COACH KELLY: Oh, did he really? Okay. Good. Sam's been -- he doesn't praise many people, so that's a good thing, including me (laughing). I'm on that list, too.

Sam's been solid. He really has. Like the way he prepares and works at it. You know, we've got more competition coming in, so it will be a good situation. We'll have a real good competition there.

**Q. Curious your assessment of how you guys tackled today.**

COACH KELLY: It's hard for me to really assess it. I mean, I have to watch it. There was some missed tackles out there, but it's a spring game. You know, there was some good, solid -- look, I thought if you turned on our film and our first scrimmage, you would have said, we lack physicality. I didn't sense that we lacked physicality out there today.

Could we tackle better? Sure. We will continue to work on it and get better at it. But I think what would concern me more is if there was a sense of a lack of physicality, and I didn't see that. We ran through some tackles, and there was some arm tackling going on out there.

But I think that my first reaction to your question would be physicality versus lack thereof, and I didn't see that.

**Q. You've stepped away from the offense throughout this spring, but being on the field and off the headset and being forced to be away from it today, I'm just curious what that was like for you.**

COACH KELLY: It was good. It was good. I have a role. I'm the head coach and I'm responsible for the offense, defense and special teams. But you know, I wanted Chip to get in the flow of calling plays. He doesn't need me in his ear right now. I'll be there. I was making decisions on whether to go for it on fourth down. Those will be decisional situations I make during the year, as well. But special teams, defense, I'll be involved in all three phases, and let my coaches coach.