



2013 DISCOVER BCS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME BRIAN KELLY CONFERENCE

Q. There have been times this year when you pulled Golson out of games that he's started. Can you describe his development so far this year, and Coach Saban just said he's underrated as a passer. What do you say?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, I think it's certainly been a year of development for him as a freshman quarterback coming in and playing for the first time against very good competition. He had his ups and downs.

The thing I love about Everett is through the adversity, he has grown. We certainly wouldn't be here without him. You know, this long layoff is talked about relative to the process for your football team and preparing them, but I will tell you there probably is only one player that has benefitted as much with this time off, and that's Everett Golson. He's gotten an opportunity for three and a half weeks to continue to grow.

Yeah, he's overcome adversity, and he's put himself in a position now that everybody trusts that he'll lead this football team.

Q. This team seems to be one that a lot of the players from the past, coaches from the past, have really embraced. Can you talk about the Notre Dame family kind of coming back together and your experience with that.

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, I think it was important for our program to get back to this point where we bring everybody back in the fold, so to speak. So I think not only winning football games but getting this program back into the conversation relative to National Championships has brought everybody closer, as well as the way this football team is constructed, and I know Nick has talked about it, too, it's a little bit old fashioned in the sense that this is about the big fellows up front. It's not about the crazy receiving numbers or passing yards or rushing yards; this is about the big fellas, and this game will be decided unquestionably up front.

Q. Go back to your first National Championship game appearance back in '01. What was it like the night before that game in '01 and then '02 and '03 and what do you have planned for tonight? And what were you personally feeling back then?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: I think more than anything else, it's the anticipation of the game because there's such a lead-up for this one with all of the media attention, where at Grand Valley State, we were staying at the Best Western. I don't know that anybody knew where we were. It was just another game. It was the championship game, but it certainly doesn't have the same kind of feel.

So when you're in a playoff structure like we were at Grand Valley State playing for a National Championship, it's the next game. It's the third and fourth game in a row, where this you have such a layoff. So it's a totally different feeling.

This one you're a little bit more anxious because you want to see your team play again. It's been such a long time. Whereas when you're in a playoff structure, you know what you're going to get from your team because you've been playing week after week.

Q. When you stand before your team tomorrow night, how much of what you say will be based in that moment and what you see in their eyes, and how much of it is a message that you've already thought through?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: It's generally been 80 percent on what I feel at the moment, but I always have something that's going to be applicable to that week. So certainly there will be a little bit of a decision that's already been made as to what theme I want to get out there.

But a lot of it has always been about the moment and getting a look at them, like you said, and getting a sense and feel for where they are at that moment.

Q. Much has been made of the process at Alabama. Can you explain your philosophy in building an organization, what the planks are of the program?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, I think it starts with setting a clear goal for the program. You know, really what is it; are we here to get to a bowl game, or are we here to win National Championships?

So the charge immediately was to play for championships and win a National Championship. So I think setting the bar.

And then I really think it's about winning and winning in everything that you do. So if there's a cornerstone -- if I asked everybody out here, what do you know about winning, most would understand that you put more points on the board. There's so much more to it than that; it's morale, it's the right people, it's creating an atmosphere where when your players come to the football building they enjoy being there.

So I think if I would probably say one thing, it's about setting the bar and what that expectation is, win a National Championship, and then create a winning atmosphere on a day-to-day basis.

Q. Win or lose tomorrow night, the first question, or soon, is going to be can Notre Dame keep doing this year after year, compete for championships. What kind of things, in your opinion, are in place for that to happen?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Playing in this game is an incredible springboard into the next season, because as I just mentioned, you set a goal, you set a bar. They've already been here. You come back the next year, it's unacceptable for a standard to be any less than being back here again. So it's an incredible springboard.

When I was playing for championships at the Division II level, it just changes everything when you walk into that building on a day-to-day basis. Everybody is playing for championships. So this will be a great springboard in making sure that we get back to this game.

Q. Talk about the challenge it is to balance your personal life at home with being a head coach during the National Championship right now. And second part, talk about Manti Te'o and his leadership role with the team.

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, I think every football coach, every CEO, everybody that puts in the time that we put in, about 80 hours a week, has to deal with the balance. And quite frankly, I don't think you ever get it right to the point where you feel like you're doing a great job with it. But you try to make sure that the time that you do have is quality time. So the balance to me is that time that you do have with your family, include them or do the best you can. Do we try to do that, Paqui? My wife is here, so she gets to sign off on most of this stuff.

It's important that what you do is include your family in what you do. I think that's probably the best way to try to find a balance.

Manti Te'o, what he's done for us off the field is probably as important as what he's done on the field. He's gotten incredible accolades and awards for what he's done on the field, but his leadership was in a large degree why we're here, as well.

Look, each year you graduate seniors, okay, and you come back with a new football team every year. We'll be ranked high after this game, and next year we'll have high expectations. But you really don't know because you have new leaders stepping up. And we didn't know what we had with Manti off the field yet, and that's why if there's any surprise as to why we're here, it's because of the great leadership that we got from him and our other seniors, and we hope this experience and how important it is to have that has helped shape the next group of leaders that we'll have next year.

Q. A lot has been made about your team over the season, about its defense and how you felt you had to build a defense to have a championship opportunity. Tomorrow night with the focus being on the defense, isn't it likely or hasn't it been the case in a lot of games of this magnitude that it'll be how your offense performs really that decides whether you win the game or not?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: I think the tenets of winning championships, you have to be at least balanced in all those phases. I believe that the quarterbacks will be important in the game. There's no question that somebody has got to have to put some points on the board.

I really think it's about who controls the line of scrimmage again. People were talking about how do you bring down Lacy, how do you bring down those backs. You don't. If there's big holes, I don't know about you guys, we ain't tackling them. We're not going to get them on the ground. So we've got to make sure that we don't have big creases so we can get them moving east and west and get them on the ground.

I still think this game is going to be decided by what happens up front.

Q. How much of a compliment is it for someone to say they see a lot of Nick Saban in you?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, Nick obviously has the reputation of being a great program builder. He's defined himself as only a few coaches that have won the championships that he has. So I take that as a great personal compliment, as it relates to constructing football programs and putting winning football teams on the field. I would take that moniker any time.

Q. I don't know if you believe in the luck of the Irish and the close victories y'all had this year, but do you believe in teams of destiny, things like that?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Honestly I don't. I think you get what you deserve. We had some close games this year, but to win those close games versus losing those close games, you have to have more than just luck. You have to have a will, a determination. You have to have a confidence. And I believe that all of those things have to be built. Every one of those words that I just used have to take place within the workings of your program.

So if it's destiny, that would be fine with me. I have not built any programs based upon we're going to get good luck or we're a team of destiny.

Q. There was an impression that you guys early in the year might be a year away. What accelerated the growth of this program?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: I think a couple things: One, an outstanding group of seniors that really helped transform our program from one where we thought we could do it to we're going to do it. We were moving towards that confidence level as a football team that they thought they could do it. I think this year because of the leadership that we got, the belief got stronger. I think some key plays and key games put that over the top, as well.

So as you know you're moving in the right direction, which you've already said that, hey, maybe you're a year away, I think what accelerated that was a group of seniors and a leadership group and then winning some games that really cemented that confidence in the group.

Q. I think everyone in this room has asked or answered the question this week, how is the game going to go? Do you think prior to a big game how that game might go, and are you usually right?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, I think the way you manage the game is something that goes into how the game is going to be played. For example, if we go in there saying, listen, we've got to outscore Alabama, the game will take that flavor. You're going to throw the ball around, there's going to be some turnovers, maybe there's going to be some big plays. That's not how we've constructed this team and that's not how we've managed the game.

I think going into the game people can surmise the way this thing is going to play out. We want to make sure that we get this thing in the fourth quarter and find a way to win the game, and that's how the game will be managed, just like the other 12 games that we played.

Q. I asked Coach Saban the same question: There's a number of players in this game from comfortable family backgrounds and there's a number from meager family backgrounds. The NCAA is talking continually about the issue of stipends for college athletes, and I wanted to get your thoughts on that issue and your position on that issue.

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, you're certainly right that the makeup of a football team is certainly from different socioeconomic groups. There's great diversity. But I still think the overriding factor here is that these young men put in so much time with being a student and then their responsibilities playing the sport, that they don't have an opportunity to make any money at all, to get a part-time job, to -- I know when I played, I worked in security and I washed dishes, anything that I could do to put a little money in my pocket so I could go to the movies or get a pizza. That's really what we're talking -- we're not talking about paying players. We're talking about let them be college

students, and a stipend to me makes total sense, and allowing them, because of all the time that they put in -- and people would say, well, they get their scholarship. We understand that. But going out on the weekend -- I want them to be college kids, and a stipend will continue to allow them to be college kids. That's my opinion.

Q. Was I imagining something yesterday, or did I really hear you say that the team that wins tomorrow night might be the one that commits the most turnovers?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: No, I said that the team that makes the most mistakes, and what I meant by that is that you have to be aggressive in this game. If you're going to sit back and hope that it's going to come your way, you're going to miss. So my point was -- and John Wooden has made this quote to be part of his philosophy, as well, and I stole it from him, and I've used it quite a few times with our football team. This is one of those games where you have to be aggressive, and you're going to make a mistake. I'm not talking about catastrophic mistakes, throwing picks for touchdowns, but you may make a mistake here. As long as you know that you're playing hard and aggressive, that's the kind of mentality and that's kind of the background to that quote that I used.

Q. You mentioned earlier with the acceleration of the program, the one-year-away thing, how key plays in key games helped with that. Looking back on it, is there one or two games that you would attribute that to? Like what specific game was it?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: You know, I don't know if there was one particular game. I think they're all billed to getting your football team believing that no matter the circumstances, they're going to find a way to win. I think it's easy to point out the goal-line stand against Stanford. I think it's easy to point out coming back from 14 points in the fourth quarter against Pittsburgh, having taken your starter out and reinserting your starter, and Everett Golson coming in and maturing. I think all those pieces come together that get you to a point where you're playing for the National Championship.

So I think a couple of those things certainly played a large role in that belief that no matter what the circumstances, they were going to find a way to win.

Q. Nick Saban talked about the psychological disposition and how that's going to be key to this game. You just kind of touched on it a little bit here. But can you define what the psychological disposition is for Notre Dame football, and how confident are you with your team heading into the game?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Fighting Irish. Fighting Irish. That's who we are, that's how we've constructed how we want our guys to play. We're going to battle you. First time our back has a chance, he'd better lower his shoulder and run through a tackle. He'd better finish off tackles, play tough and physical. We want that kind of demeanor.

Our guys understand how I want them to play the game. That's why we're here. We tried to play the game this way the first couple years; we just couldn't quite get there. They play the game like Fighting Irish, and that's how we want to play the game tomorrow.

Q. I'm wondering, in your time in Michigan and Coach Saban's time in Michigan, did your paths ever cross at conventions, clinics, public appearances, anything like that?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Public appearances for Nick? (Laughter.)

Nick Saban, I got a chance to know him when he was at Toledo, a very short stint at Toledo, but I got a chance to know him through a couple of camps that I worked at, and got to know him better when he was at Michigan State. And I have a great deal of respect for him and followed his career, his path, and certainly when we see each other today, we're reminded about where we started. We both started in the Mid-American Conference, so a lot of the times that we talk, we talk about the times back in Ohio and Michigan.

Q. Alabama has been on this stage before, obviously playing in this game. Your guys, though they're on national TV all the time, there's so much pressure at Notre Dame. Are you confident your guys won't feel any stage fright?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: They'll be nervous coming out, they'll question the moment, the anticipation, just the buildup to playing in the game. But once the game starts, they'll be fine. They enjoy the attention. That's why they go to Notre Dame. They know that they're going to get a chance to play on national television and in front of large crowds.

There will be a little bit of nervousness that will go along with the start of the game, but they've handled this whole process very well, and I expect that to continue tomorrow.

Q. Coach Saban was just asked if he's sick of all the media opportunities this week. How about you?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: You know, it hasn't been bad at all. I think the bowl games sometimes there's a lot more that you have relative to joint ventures together with the teams, and our players will be at the Children's Hospital today. But really, the way the National Championship game is set up, a lot of that media is done prior to getting here. A lot of that media work for us was done before we even got on the plane.

So it's been really good. Our team has been able to focus on practice and enjoying being here, but no, I would say that the schedule has been really smooth.

Q. You talked about how being in this game really raises the standard, raises the bar for your program. I think everybody who's been in this game has probably felt the same way. But nobody in the BCS era has been able to repeat a BCS Championship. Alabama is going for that. In your opinion, why have they been able to kind of have this run that they've been on?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: It starts with Coach Saban and the consistency of his philosophy and approach. You know what you're going to get from him every single day. You're going to get a disciplined program both on and off the field; you're going to get great coaching, great teaching; and you're going to get a football team that knows how to play the game. And it starts with Coach Saban and his consistency of approach and the way he goes about doing his job on a day-to-day basis.

You know, I think we all try to do the same things. He's added obviously great recruiting to that, as well, and again, created expectations, just like we need to do the same thing at Notre Dame, that they're going to play in this game every year.