



2013 DISCOVER NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP NOTRE DAME MEDIA DAY QUOTES

HEAD COACH BRIAN KELLY

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Feels like I'm in a dunk tank. There's nothing out there, I hope. You know, when you get a chance to go before the media at the venue, it finally hits you that it's getting close. It's been a long journey to get to this point for us. Certainly we're excited to be here. But more importantly, we're here to win a football game.

I like the way our guys have handled this, this long journey, but more importantly the time here in Miami. The Orange Bowl Committee, when you talk about hospitality, they understand what that means. We've been treated great all week. Our kids have enjoyed Miami. They've enjoyed all of the venues. But you can sense and you can feel that they're ready to play, and I know as a football team we'll be ready to play Monday night. With that, I'll open it up to questions.

Q. Talk about the match-up with Alabama. There's been speculation about the NFL showing interest in you. Can you confirm that some people from the NFL have contacted your agent and inquired?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, you know, any of those things that occur relative to contact, there's a strict protocol for that. They have to contact my representation and then they've got to follow through that.

If that did occur, then all that stuff is secondary to this football game. My focus -- this is the biggest game that I've ever been involved in, so my focus is 100 percent on this football game. All that other stuff, that happens when you're winning football games. I've been through this a lot in my career. It's flattering if there is interest, which I don't know that there is, but again, that is such a secondary topic for me right now, it's all about this game.

Q. Coach Saban said he was a college coach after having dipped into the NFL. Is that the same for you? Are you a college coach or has the NFL ever been a desire for you?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: No, and I think when I took the job at Notre Dame, I think I said it was a dream job. But I never went around day to day anything about being the Notre Dame head coach, because the job that I had in hand was what I was thinking about. And I think that's the same thing with the NFL.

I think from my perspective I've got the best job in the country, NFL, college, high school, whatever. I just look at the place that I'm at and thankful for the opportunity that I have.

Q. You have embraced the nostalgia with Notre Dame when you took this job. There are worldwide fans for the Fighting Irish. How much pressure is on this team?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: I think there's been pressure on this football team since I stepped on campus. What we've tried to do is take that pressure of unfulfilled expectations to

one of let's be who we are. As we get into Monday night we're going to play the game the way we've played it all year. We're going to play fast, we're going to play aggressive because we don't carry all those perceived burdens. They're 18 to 21 year olds, they have no idea what that history means. We do, our fan base certainly does, but what I've tried hard to do is let our kids go play the game and let their actions speak, and not let all of this outside perceived pressure for the entire Notre Dame nation to weigh heavily on them.

Q. I just wanted to know, Assumption College doesn't have the program size that Notre Dame does, but is there anything you took away from playing there or coaching there that you've taken to Notre Dame?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Absolutely. All of my stops along my career have been formative for me to be where I am today. Assumption College, a Division II program with no scholarships, I remember having to take my car, turn the lights on so we could paint the field Friday night before the Saturday game. The coaches did that.

All of those experiences help formulate who you are today. I know how to appreciate the work that our support staff puts in every single day, and I think all those things help you when you get to Notre Dame.

Q. What's the biggest difference between those championships back at Grand Valley and the surrounding stuff and what your team has been going through this week?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, you might not know, but there are some great similarities. I've always felt when you take your team to a championship site, it's important to take in all that's going on and really enjoy it. I want to keep our team loose. I want to keep them excited about getting back here each and every year because this is our destination. We want to be playing in this game. I don't want them to be tight and tense.

And so my experiences in other championship games, I've tried to use a little bit of that here and keeping our guys loose and enjoying the opportunities that they have here, as well.

Q. Now that you're in this atmosphere, in the stadium, what would it mean to raise that trophy on this field on Monday night?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, certainly this is why we do it. I mean, this is the -- for you guys, what is it, the Emmys? We all look to aspire to the top of our profession, and this is the pinnacle for players and coaches is to be the best. And so that's what it would mean is that you have taken your team and your program to the top of college football. It would certainly mean a lot.

Q. Talk about the absolute critical key match-up, what would be the critical key one?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: I would say O-line, D-line. I think you're going to see can you get the ball off? Do you have all day? Can you run the ball when you want to run the ball when everybody knows you've got to run the football?

I think when you have two great football teams, I know this is -- and you guys know it and hear it more than anything else, but in these kinds of games, it's going to be decided up front.

Q. A number of people have come forth with an opinion that you take a more measured approach on the sideline now than maybe a few years ago. Do you agree with that opinion? And if so, is it a conscious decision on your part?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: It's time and place. It's time and place relative to that measured approach that you're talking about. First couple of years we needed to grow, and I was hard on our team, there's no question. I don't have to have that kind of same presence with our football team in year 3. They understand exactly what the expectations are, and I don't have to remind them. I was doing a lot of reminding in the first couple of years. Doing much

less of that, but that's pretty typical in my stays at each program is that by your third year, everybody is on the same page.

Q. Can you talk about the SC game, the long layoff and maybe your team peaking at the right time on Monday night.

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, the same concern. I know Nick probably feels the same way. You have this kind of layoff, and you use a plan, but there's just so many things that are outside of our control, and as you know as coaches, we're control freaks. So you have to do a great job of communicating with your team, how do they feel, what do we need to accomplish today.

I think what I try to do is really be transparent with each and every day, working from December the 3rd all the way up to today in terms of what we wanted from them. Give me an hour, give me 45 minutes, give me an hour and a half of focused work. So the process for me has been to try to be very transparent and communicate very well with our team because you have such a long period of time.

If they don't know what to expect from you in this long layoff, I think that's where you can run into some problems. I think we've done a pretty good job of that.

Q. Knowing how hard it is to get to this point, what have you thought about what Coach Saban has done the past few years to get here?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, we're talking about historic success. We're not talking about somebody that wasn't ranked last year, Notre Dame, or at the start of the year. So those are defined -- and I've said this a number of times, your program is defined in consistency, and Alabama is that model. I concede to that. It's where we want to be. We want to be back here next year. I think there's been some commentators that have talked about, is Notre Dame for real? Well, for me we're for real because we're here. We won all of our games; that's clear. Where is Notre Dame going to be as it relates to the consistency thing? And that's why I'm the head coach and that's why I want to be the head coach, because I want to show we can do this consistently.

Q. A lot of people have said that next year would maybe be the year where you guys would start to peak. Why has it happened this year?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, we had some pieces that came together more so in the locker room, leadership, demanding, accountability from others, and things that coaches can't do by themselves. So the dynamic of college coaching is that each year it's a new team, and there's new leaders. Those that were put in that position to lead did an extraordinary job of leading, and I'm sitting here in front of you because I've got great leaders that have celebrated the growth of the program.

Q. When you look at those guys that were supposed to be peaking next year, what kind of experience can this, the National Championship, give them going forward?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Invaluable, and invaluable in terms of experience, but also the bar gets set to a level where anything less than that is disappointing. So it just does so much more for your program.

Q. How has your coaching style changed since you were coaching softball at Assumption in 1987?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: You know, I think I'm a lot smarter in terms of understanding personalities. You can't drive everybody the same way. I'm somebody that still communicates the same way. I'm still going to get my point across.

But I think I'm a lot better at understanding how different people are motivated, and I think I've adapted well to that.

Q. Along those same lines, Grand Valley to here now, how many staples from Grand Valley are still within what you do at Notre Dame?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Oh, many. Many. The things that I learned at Grand Valley, from a head coaching experience, and again, that was 13 years of being a head coach, are still in play with what I do here at Notre Dame. There's no question.

As I mentioned, experiences along the way at Assumption College and Central Michigan and Cincinnati have allowed me to continue to grow. I'm still growing, I'll learn from this experience.

But yeah, it's all part of the process.

Q. Can you give some examples maybe, a couple examples of things that are in your system.

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, I would say more than anything else, painting a vision. This is where we're going to go, and every single day is going to be focused on getting to this point. So that hasn't changed.

Q. Do you feel like your guys are already national champions and you just have to win one more game?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: We needed to prepare to be the best team on January 7th, and all the focus, all the preparation has been on one night and getting to that one night and winning the football game. So that has been the focus of attention and communication about playing one game on January 7th, and all of it leading up to that.

Q. Being the underdog, does that make you mad? Is it a motivating factor?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Somebody has got to be an underdog. I would say Alabama has got the belt, and they deserve the belt. We've got to take it from them.

Q. You talk about coaches being control freaks, and Nick Saban is really big on the mental aspect of the game. For lack of a better word, and I know it's a negative connotation, but brainwashing. But is that a positive thing? And how much of that do you try to do with your team to get them to believe and kind of be on the same page, one voice, that kind of thing?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Belief is crucial. If you don't believe that you can do it, you probably can't. So I think everything we do is to reinforce all the things that they're capable of doing. Look, they're 18 to 21 years olds. The sky's the limit.

I don't think there's a football coach out there, I don't think there's a great CEO out there that does not try to employ some form of positive reinforcement and motivation that you can be whatever you want to be.

Having said that, there are so many other pieces to it that I think are more important than, quote-unquote, getting them to think that they can do it. They've actually got to go out and do it. And I think the biggest challenge for me here in the first couple of years was to get our guys to prepare the right way and to play the game the right way. You've still got to execute and play this game the right way. Belief comes with winning. The best form of confidence is when you make that play.

Just to answer the question precisely, all of that is good. Motivational speaking, bringing in all those power of positive thinking, that's all good. But you'd better be prepared and you'd better have put in the time because you're going to get what you deserve if you don't put in the time and effort necessary. That's why we're here today.

Q. You're friends with Mack Brown at Texas.

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Yes.

Q. He played in this game twice, won one, lost one to Alabama. Have you talked to him about that stage?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, he's been a great mentor to me. When I was at Grand Valley State, he allowed me on a couple occasions to spend time with him. We coached in the Hula Bowl together. He's just been very helpful.

He's not one to give advice. He's not that way. But he'll pick up the phone, and if you're calling he'll answer your questions, and that's always been really good for me in my career.

Q. What do you remember of that experience of coaching softball at Assumption?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, I will tell you, honestly, that one of the characteristics that I really enjoyed about coaching the women is that they weren't going on to the next level. They were playing the game because they loved it, and so in my recruiting, yeah, there's profiles; our guards aren't going to be 5'9". There's going to be a profile for all those positions. But one of those pieces and the charge that I give my assistant coaches, they'd better love to play the game.

And so I think my experience in coaching women and seeing their passion for playing the game -- because they knew they weren't going to go anywhere else. This is what they loved to do. I want guys that love to play the game.

Q. You've done a number of different things at Notre Dame, on one side diagraming how a locker is supposed to be arranged to on the other side installing Xbox and Playstations for the players to enjoy. How do you see those little things contributing to a winning program?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Well, I think it's a combination of real-life experiences. I want my kid to clean his room. He has a hard time doing it. I like it when it's clean. But I also know he's got an Xbox in his room. You know, they're young guys. We try to make it so when they come over to our football building, it's not a job, it's real-life experiences. We have expectations of them to be on time, to take care of the detail things, but we also want them to hang out with each other, and we want them to sit down and feel comfortable to be over in our building, and when they have some downtime to have some fun.

I think it's balance. It can't be all work, and it can't be all play. I think a good balance of that is a good, healthy environment.

Q. Just big picture question: This is going to be a 15-game season in the not-too-distant future. You're going to have multiple millions of dollars on the line in a national playoff, and as you mentioned you're dealing with 18 to 21 year old kids. How concerned are you about the pressures on them, and basically this is becoming a full-time job?

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, we're going to have to do a really good job. I'm used to playing 15 games, playing for a National Championship. It's a long road. But I think as long as we have this thing planned out where we're not playing in late January and February, I think we can be in a good position. We play a 12-game schedule, there's a championship game, then if we can get right back to work, there's such a routine there that I'm not concerned with it. I think if we start talking about 16 and 32 teams, something is going to have to give on one end. Something is going to have to give on the regular season because we're not going to be able to play this thing into February. So that would be the concern that I have.

Q. Just physically on the kids --

COACH BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, you can do it. They play 20 games in the NFL. I know they're older, they're much more mature, but they play four preseason and 16. We're going to have to take an approach that you're going to have to take the pads off, we're going to have to be smart. I did it at Grand Valley State. We took the pads off after the second round. We didn't

put the pads back on until the Saturdays that we played. I know Division IA does it, Division II does it, we're going to have to learn from them.

TYLER EIFERT

Q. What are your thoughts on Alabama's defense?

TYLER EIFERT: Hard to find a weakness there. You know, they're just a -- they're big, they're fast, they're physical. Everything you'd want in a defense.

Q. How has the progression helped you develop?

TYLER EIFERT: You know, me and Everett, we've kind of grown together. He was a first-time starter and he was -- the first time I had played with him is this year, too. You know, it's taken a little time, but we've grown to be on the same page now.

Q. Talk about the history of these two programs. Is there something about playing at Notre Dame where the history wears on you or is there a part of it you enjoy?

TYLER EIFERT: Yeah, at Notre Dame we always say we don't play for just ourselves or our coaches, we play for all the guys that have played at Notre Dame before and set the stage for us now.

Q. Are you aware of the lore? Do you know about the Horsemen, all the stories?

TYLER EIFERT: Yeah.

Q. Did you know that going in, or is that just something you've embraced as you've been there?

TYLER EIFERT: I've just embraced it as I've been there, really.

Q. How much of Alabama's story are you aware of?

TYLER EIFERT: Not much. I just -- I mean, I'm just worried about their defense, really.

Q. Well, I understand when you're a 22-year-old guy, you're playing for today. But I'm just trying to figure out, is it just for the alumni, or does it mean something to today's player to play in a storied program?

TYLER EIFERT: I mean, it means a lot. That's why I came to Notre Dame. It's a good school with a good tradition and a lot of history. It's definitely important.

Q. Everyone is talking about the match-up problems that you pose. When you look at film and look at their personnel, what do you see from the match-ups that you're going to have to face with some of their backers?

TYLER EIFERT: Yeah, their linebackers are good cover guys, too. They can run. They have some really good cover corners. That definitely will be a challenge. People talk about their secondary being a weakness, but it's not. The rest of their defense is so good that it's -- I guess if you want to pick out a weakness, maybe that's it. But their secondary is still very good.

Q. What's the best part about playing for Brian Kelly?

TYLER EIFERT: You know, I think a lot of the players have a good relationship with him. On the field he's a coach, and he'll lay into you. But off the field he's willing to talk to you, anything you need, and he's always got our back.

Q. How important do you think discipline is to the success of a team?

TYLER EIFERT: I think it's huge. Coach Kelly when he first got here he put a picture in our locker of how our lockers have to look every day. If our helmet is not in the right spot, then

you get in trouble. It just started from day one with Coach Kelly, the discipline, attention to detail aspect.

Q. How would you describe how Everett's personality and sort of demeanor has been?

TYLER EIFERT: You know, it really hasn't changed much. He's a young quarterback, but he doesn't let the bright lights or the big stage get to him at all. He's still quiet at times, but he's a goofy guy, likes to joke around a lot, too.

Q. How would you describe his sort of leadership style in the huddle during a pressure situation?

TYLER EIFERT: Yeah. The only time we really are in a huddle is kind of in practice. We don't huddle on the field.

But yeah, he's kind of embraced that as the year has gone on, been more vocal. Being a freshman starting quarterback it's kind of hard to come in right away and kind of boss people around. But he's kind of proved his -- proved what he can do and earned his stripes, so people really respect him.

Q. At what point do you think that you guys totally believed in his ability to lead?

TYLER EIFERT: I think the Oklahoma game. We keep going back to that, but that was one of his best games, one of our biggest wins. At the time that was a huge game for us. For him to go out there and play the way he did, that was -- that gave us a lot of confidence in him.

Q. What changed for your team prior to that Oklahoma game?

TYLER EIFERT: You know, I don't know how much changed, but --

Q. In terms of the mindset and confidence.

TYLER EIFERT: Yeah, I guess the BCS was a real -- it really became real at that point. We knew we kind of had control of -- if we take care of business, we'll be going to a BCS game and possibly here. Once that really became real, I think it really narrowed our focus down and made us a little more focused.

Q. How has Brian Kelly been this week?

TYLER EIFERT: He's been good. I mean, before we came here, he said we're going down there to work. It's a business trip. But we're not going to sit in our hotel rooms and be all uptight just waiting for the game to get here. We're here for one reason, but we're going to enjoy it while we're here.

Q. What was your reaction walking out on this field and seeing the trophy?

TYLER EIFERT: It was awesome. We have a replica in our workout facility, but to see that was really cool. Watching the Orange Bowl game, the grass was so green, it was the most perfect field I'll be able to play on, so that's cool.

Q. We've been asking all week, has it sunk in, but coming out here, did it sink in a little bit more?

TYLER EIFERT: Yeah. I mean, the first day of practice it really sunk in that we're not here on vacation, we're here to win a football game. So yeah, it's great to be here in the stadium.

Q. (Inaudible.)

TYLER EIFERT: No, they're definitely the best defense we'll see all year.

Q. (Inaudible.)

TYLER EIFERT: Yeah, our defense is the closest that we'll have to getting ready for Alabama, physicality, size and speed.

Q. What do you think DeVaris Daniels might give you?

TYLER EIFERT: He's been able to step up all year in big situations, made some big catches for us. You know, he's not a guy that gets talked about a whole lot, but he's a fast receiver, deceptively fast, and he's an athletic guy, he can definitely make some plays.

Q. Are there personality traits of Coach Kelly we don't see?

TYLER EIFERT: No, everything I've seen with the media and stuff, he seems to be himself. He jokes around a little bit with you guys, and he's serious when he needs to be serious, but we like to enjoy playing, too.

Q. Some of the defenders have grown beards. You're one of the few offensive guys to do it. Is there any significance to that?

TYLER EIFERT: No, I went No-Shave November for a while, and I didn't go with the season-long beard. This is kind of maybe a little bit of laziness, if anything.

Q. There's no significance?

TYLER EIFERT: No, not for me.

MANTI TE'O

Q. (Inaudible.)

MANTI TE'O: I mean, every game is a defensive battle. It's a defensive, offensive and special-teams battle. You know, I'm expecting to just be part of a really good game.

Q. You've got the family coming, but how has the ticket situation been for this game?

MANTI TE'O: It's been good. I have six family members coming in, and that's the amount of tickets we're given. It worked out pretty good.

Q. Do you get a lot of others that hit you up for tickets?

MANTI TE'O: Obviously. I think every individual who plays in this game is contacted from family members that they haven't met yet.

Q. Walking in here does it become more real?

MANTI TE'O: Yeah, it's becoming really real, especially as I walked on this field. Haven't seen it yet, and this is my first time seeing it, first time seeing the crystal ball up close. To know that Monday I could be part of the team that hoists that crystal ball, it's definitely becoming real.

Q. (Inaudible.)

MANTI TE'O: I think we understand what Alabama does, and people understand what we can do. It's all about executing, and I think that's football at its finest. You know, teams that just line up and play their hearts out and just play tough, physical football.

Q. Does that make it more difficult or easier?

MANTI TE'O: Whether you know what they're going to do or not, you've still got to plan just the same. You know, who knows? Alabama can come out and do something totally different. You never know. But what we do know is that we're going against a really good team that has proven itself over the past couple years, and we've just got to come out and play.

Q. Are you getting a sense of how real this is becoming, just the sense of the historical significance of this?

MANTI TE'O: Yeah, I'm starting to, just because of the advertisements and the commercials. To hear the history and the tradition we both know about Alabama and Notre Dame and this historic game. It's a really good publicized game, and it's going to be a good game to watch.

Q. TJ talked about restoring a buzz at Notre Dame from a national perspective and how this game will do that. Do a lot of you guys feel the same way?

MANTI TE'O: Yeah, I think so. I think that's something that's always on our mind, but it's not the biggest thing that's on our mind. I think for us we're just focusing on the team that's here now, and I think once we focus on us, on the guys in the locker room, everything else will take care of itself.

Q. Did you envision this four years ago?

MANTI TE'O: Never. Never.

Q. (Inaudible.)

MANTI TE'O: I think it's a combination of both the players and the coaches. You know, we're led by one of the best assistant coaches in college football, Coach Diaco and his coaching staff, and they're not just -- they don't just teach us the techniques and fundamentals of the game. They help incorporate the mentality that you must have in order to be dominant in this game. We're fortunate enough to have coaches that have played the game, so they know how we feel at certain points, they know what makes us tick because it's the same thing that made them tick. I think with that and the combination of the guys we have -- in order to be here you can't just have some average Joe players, and the same goes with Alabama. We know they have really, really good players, and so do we.

With our defense, it's just a combination of the both.

Q. (Inaudible.)

MANTI TE'O: I think whenever you -- in order to make it this far, you can't be a team of individuals. You have to be a team that plays as one, as one unit, and that trusts in each other and have kids on the team that plays for the guy next to him. And I think that's exactly what we have. You know, we've demonstrated that throughout the year by the close games we've had, and also the big victories we've had. We've demonstrated that brotherhood that we have on this team.

Q. How well did you get to know Barrett Jones? And can you describe your impressions of him and what it will be like to play against him.

MANTI TE'O: Just a real good guy. I got to know Barrett well. He and I were at a few functions together, being at the awards circuit. But he's just a real good guy, very smart. He's obviously the captain and leader of the offensive line, or the offense. He's just very smart.

Q. (Inaudible.)

MANTI TE'O: Yeah, it's going to be nice. I think it's going to remind me of high school where I had friends on the other team, and it just creates a more competitive environment when you know the guy, not just for his number but for who he is and what he stands for.

Q. Jesse Williams said he feels a bond with you, too. Can you talk a little bit about that.

MANTI TE'O: Yeah, I think the Polynesian players -- players alike, but Polynesian players, we have a certain amount of pride. We take a certain amount of pride in the way we play football but also the way we conduct ourselves off the field. I didn't know Jesse was

Polynesian until I saw his tattoos. I think that's a great tale for a Polynesian player, is his tattoos. I saw a few of his tattoos and immediately I knew not only who he was but what he stood for because it permeates through every Polynesian player out there.

Q. Talk about having three All-Americans on the offensive line. Is it kind of fitting to have this huge test ahead of you?

MANTI TE'O: Yeah, I think when you go against a team like Alabama, we understand that they're the king of the hill. They've been there, they've done that, they obviously have been so dominant the past couple years and this season, as well. So we understand who we're going up against.

Like I said, what better way to finish this year but to play in the biggest game in college football and to be going against the best team in college football, and that's Alabama.

Q. (Inaudible.)

MANTI TE'O: It's come really far. It's just a different team. It's a different mentality. We understand that we can't do it on our own. We understand that it's not the senior class versus the junior class versus the sophomore class. It's not like that on this team. It's a team. It doesn't matter how old you are, it doesn't matter how many snaps you've had. We're a team and we're going to win and lose as a team.

Q. Talk about the Michigan State game and also (inaudible).

MANTI TE'O: Yeah, Le'Veon is just a big back. He's very talented, and he does a lot of great things. He's going to have success at the next level. I just found out he's going to enter into the NFL Draft, so he's going to have a lot of success there.

But that Michigan State game was another physical game that we played in, and another game that helped mold our team to what it is today.

Q. What are you hoping your legacy is?

MANTI TE'O: At Notre Dame I hope my legacy is just a guy who gave Notre Dame his all, a guy who really committed himself to the school, and I really feel fortunate to play under the Golden Dame and receive an education there. Just one who really gave everything he had.

Q. (Inaudible.)

MANTI TE'O: Yeah, Shane Victorino is just a real good guy. We met him before and had the opportunity just to hang out with him for a couple days, and like I said, it's that bond between Polynesian players and even non-Polynesian players who know what Hawai'i is all about. Rob had the opportunity to be with Davone Bess yesterday and just chill with him. You may not know the guy, but just because he's Polynesian or because he's from Hawai'i, feels like you know a lot about him without even meeting him. Just to have Shane here and have him experience this moment with us, he's family.

Q. You guys have had nine first quarter shutouts. What is the key to getting off to a fast start?

MANTI TE'O: Yeah, Coach always talks about the four quarters of success, and the first quarter is obviously start fast. If you're going to play in the National Championship, you'd better start fast. It's not, okay, you guys, we've got to start fast; it's a must, especially since we're going up against a team that's really, really good.

So defensively we have to do what we have to do. We've got to limit the points, and we have to make sure that we're doing everything we can to get the ball in our offense's hands.

EVERETT GOLSON

Q. Are you ready for the game?

EVERETT GOLSON: I think so. Just being out here today, you know, being in the stadium, it makes you kind of realize that it's really basically here. Now I'm ready and anxious for it.

Q. (Inaudible.)

EVERETT GOLSON: They've been good. They've been good. I think the team has been really dialed into what we have going on, you know, and it's just been tremendous for us.

Q. (Inaudible.)

EVERETT GOLSON: You know, I don't know, to be honest, because I don't really listen to the naysayers. I'm just focused on what I can control on the field and with the team.

Q. What is your confidence level?

EVERETT GOLSON: Definitely high. I feel like it has to be. Being that I'm the leader of this team, the leader of this offense, it has to be high. So I'm definitely ready to go, like I said earlier.

Q. (Inaudible.)

EVERETT GOLSON: I think just everything I've been through this season. You know, the progression I've made from game 1 to now, the trust in my teammates and the trust that they have in me, you know, just that type of thing makes me a lot more confident now.

Q. How much better is this team now than it was at the start of the season?

EVERETT GOLSON: Oh, I think we've seen a lot of progression. You know, as far as just specifically offense, we struggled in the beginning of the season, and that's due to coaching changes and me being young and going into that starting spot. But I think we've progressed week in and week out.

Q. (Inaudible.)

EVERETT GOLSON: Probably zero. No, I feel like, like I said, we've progressed a lot, and that's the way to go. I'm never going to be comfortable with where we're at because I always think we could be so much better.

Q. Is this a game where you guys can just maintain (inaudible)?

EVERETT GOLSON: Well, I think you have to make some big plays. It's going to be tough because Alabama has a great defense, and they also have a great running attack on offense. As they make their big plays, we're going to have to make big plays to win this game, too. I think we know that and the coaches know that. It's all up to us to just really execute the plan.

Q. When you're looking at video, what do you see from them?

EVERETT GOLSON: Athletic, great defensive scheme, and they play their responsibilities. It's going to be real tough. It's going to be a real challenge for us, but we're ready for this opportunity.

Q. Is it a lot of reads when you're back that you've got to be aware of when you're facing them?

EVERETT GOLSON: Yeah, I think so. They do little things like something one way and then they'll spin it back the other way, so you have to be ready for that. When you think you're

right, you may be wrong. Just being ready for that and just preparing for that makes me more confident, ready to go into this game.

Q. You've stayed pretty steady throughout this process, how have you been able to do that?

EVERETT GOLSON: Yeah, well, I think just not riding that wave, just kind of staying level headed, trusting in my teammates, believing in my teammates and just really staying level headed to be honest.

Q. Talk about the Michigan State game. What happened for you in that game as far as how it played out in your development and the team's season?

EVERETT GOLSON: I think the Michigan State game helped me out a little bit. I think at that time I was still maybe thinking a little bit too much, but the Michigan State game, it was good. I think it really built a little more confidence in me from my teammates a little bit more. And obviously I was kind of upset at the end of the game because I got taken out and whatnot. But it kind of assured me that I was growing a little bit.

Q. Was it a test for your team, first road game?

EVERETT GOLSON: Oh, yeah, it was definitely a test, being that they were No. 10, we were No. 20. We were counted out, and we were the underdogs, same similar situation we're in now. But we just really believed in ourselves, and I think that's what took us over there.

Q. (Inaudible.)

EVERETT GOLSON: I did not. I did not. I'm asking around, though.

Q. (Inaudible.)

EVERETT GOLSON: I think it was necessarily probably -- it would probably be the Miami game for me is where I really settled down and tried to get back to what I do best as a quarterback, and just improvising and kind of just being me. So I kind of played a little bit looser, and I think as the season went on, that's what you kind of saw in the Oklahoma game, the Pitt game, was just me being myself a little bit and just playing loose.

Q. (Inaudible.)

EVERETT GOLSON: I hope so. Johnny Manziel is a great quarterback, obviously he won the Heisman. We watched the tape, but it's not only what he does with his legs, it's also how he finally found his match-ups. So the coaches have a great plan. We're definitely just looking to execute that plan.

Q. Do you think it's an advantage having experience in the BCS Championship game?

EVERETT GOLSON: I don't think so. More so we see it as a competition against Alabama. It's not necessarily what the media makes it out to be as the BCS National Championship. We understand what we're playing for, but at the same time we can only control what's going on on the field. That's our plan for Alabama.

Q. (Inaudible.)

EVERETT GOLSON: I don't. You know, being that statistics show that it's the top two defenses in the country, so obviously it's going to be a defensive battle. As I said before, on offense we want to make big plays. We think us making big plays will hopefully help us get over.

Q. Knowing you're going up against a team like this that doesn't give up a lot of big plays (inaudible)?

EVERETT GOLSON: Oh, definitely, definitely. Like I said before, being that Alabama does play their responsibilities, has a great defensive scheme, everything is not going to be drawn up to plan. You're going to have to improvise, you're going to have to make plays for yourself, so I think I'm ready for it.

Q. (Inaudible.)

EVERETT GOLSON: Yeah. It was kind of just me from the beginning. I think what really made me choose No. 5 was at the time, probably Donovan McNabb, and I always like Donovan McNabb, he wasn't necessarily the fastest like the Michael Vick types, but he could get yards and he had a great arm.

Q. How big are you right now compared to when you went to high school? Do you feel stronger and more durable?

EVERETT GOLSON: Oh, I do. Compared to when I left high school, I think it's kind of night and day a little bit for me. But no, definitely with my physicality, I think it's definitely a long way to go, and I think that's what we're going to work on in the off-season is just trying to put on another layer for me.

Q. What's your weight?

EVERETT GOLSON: I can't remember what it was then, and I can't remember the last time I weighed in. Six feet, 190.

Q. At least 10 pounds heavier?

EVERETT GOLSON: Yeah.

Q. You're from the South, how sick do you get of the SEC talk, six titles going on seven?

EVERETT GOLSON: Well, I think it would mean a lot, not just because of the history -- well, obviously because of the history of it, but just me being a competitor and wanting to win this game, winning this National Championship. So I think it would mean a lot to this team.

ZACK MARTIN

ZACK MARTIN: You don't have a season at 12-0 and not go through -- you have some kind of point like that where you get a little lucky. It's hard to go 12-0 as it is. Yeah, definitely heard it a couple times this season, we had some close games, but we don't really pay attention to that. Pittsburgh was the biggest game.

Q. When you walked out of that game did you really think you guys could do it? And also when you win game like that do you think, hey, maybe this is meant to be?

ZACK MARTIN: Yeah, I mean, every year when you play a close game like that and kind of -- yeah, like you say, dodge a bullet almost, you kind of think -- you kind of rethink the season and kind of like we've got to come out and play our best against everyone, and that's what we did the rest of the year. We focused on being the same team every week and not playing different two opponents.

Q. I spoke to a few of your teammates yesterday and just asked them about a turning point in the year, the moment things clicked. It may have been in the off-season, may have been during the year. Some guys said Stanford, some guys said Oklahoma.

Was there a moment where you thought this team, maybe on the field, locker room, we're starting to get it down?

ZACK MARTIN: Yeah, coming into the season there was a lot of question marks because coming off two 8-5 seasons we knew we've always had the talent. We just didn't know what was missing. Obviously with the group of guys this year, the attitude, it's Coach Kelly's third year, it obviously takes a couple years to get everything going, and this is the year kind of everything started clicking.

When you beat a team like Stanford, who's pretty much beaten us up the last couple years, and to go in there and have a win like that, that was a big moment in the season.

Q. What was different on the offensive line this year?

ZACK MARTIN: I think just playing -- everyone on the offensive line thinks it's -- you've got one good guy, two good guys, even four good guys to have a good offensive line, but to have the consistency of five offensive linemen playing together, and I think that's the reason it's changed is we're on the same page more and more. We're still not there yet, but we're getting there, and Coach has done a great job of coaching us there.

Q. Anything quirky or different with Coach Kelly that people don't know about, anything he does in practice or just in general?

ZACK MARTIN: No, I mean, he's a real personal guy. I know when people think of head coaches, they sometimes think of someone they're scared of or can't talk to. But he always has his door open and is joking in practice and is serious when he needs to be, but he's fun to play for.

Q. What kind of jokes does he have?

ZACK MARTIN: You make relationships with him, and he tells a lot of personal jokes, and it's good.

Q. Can you describe the physicality it's going to take to win this one in the trenches.

ZACK MARTIN: Yeah, there's no secret it's going to be a very physical game. Alabama likes to run the ball and they're known for stopping the run, and that's been our MO this year on our defense is to stop the run. It's going to be two teams going out there and hitting each other in the mouth, and luckily that's one of the things we've improved on this year is kind of bringing more of a physical game. I know our guys are up for it, and we know Alabama is going to be up for it. So it should be a fun one.

Q. What's the glue for this team? Obviously undefeated, and that comes with what you did on the field, but also there's got to be something more there?

ZACK MARTIN: I think just the togetherness of the team. I've been here four years now, and I think this is definitely the closest team I've been a part of, guys being with each other outside of football, always hanging around each other and talking football and having fun outside of football. So the closeness of this group is something special.

Q. What's the relationship like between the defense and the offense?

ZACK MARTIN: Yeah, that's the thing. They've been so good all year, and we know that they've kind of been the rock of the team. They were pulling for us always. They're coming out to the huddle and letting us go down. When people get injured they go out there and are checking on them. In practice we're trying to beat each other up, but like I said before, the closeness of this group is special.

Q. Over the last handful of games the way the offense has really progressed and Everett in particular, what can you say about just the progress that you've seen, and how fired up are you to see him go out there?

ZACK MARTIN: Yeah, that's what we've talked about from the season. We want to be better week 4 than we were week 1, week 8 than we were week 4. We've done that, we've been better every week, and I think we're playing our best football now. To see the development of Everett, we all knew he had the potential to be great, and he's showing that.

Q. Just the tradition that is Notre Dame football, just to have the opportunity -- you've put them back on the map, but the opportunity to go out there --

ZACK MARTIN: Yeah, it's great. At Notre Dame you play for some more than yourself. You play for your guys in the locker room but you play for the tradition and the players before you, and they do a great job of keeping us connected to the alumni. It's really something special. If you're not a part of the Notre Dame family, you don't really know unless you're a part of it that it's something special.

Q. Talk about all the SEC talk, seventh straight title.

ZACK MARTIN: Everyone says that, but you can't argue with it, they've won six titles in a row. They deserve everything they've got, obviously great football teams down there. So we're going to do our best to try to break that, but they've been great the last six, seven years.

Q. Would it add to it just a little bit if you could knock off the SEC?

ZACK MARTIN: I think winning a title either way would just be something special.

Q. Walking into the stadium does it make it a little more real to you when you look around?

ZACK MARTIN: Yeah, I mean, I didn't know -- this is pretty sweet, and everyone on the team is looking forward to coming here Monday night, and apparently the locker room is awesome. So we're looking forward to it.

Q. What was your first thought when you looked around?

ZACK MARTIN: The field looks great. The field looks awesome, just being here a few days ago. It looks great. So looking forward to playing on that.

Q. I heard one guy say, geez, this is orange.

ZACK MARTIN: Yeah. We've been lucky, we've been able to practice at the Dolphins' facility this week, so we've seen plenty of orange.

Q. Everybody talks about Alabama's defense and how tough they are, but everybody also talks about how tough your defense is, too. How are you better because you've gone up against your defense?

ZACK MARTIN: Right, and everyone has asked me what do you compare Alabama's defense to, and I've said our defense is very similar. They run a 3-4, they've got a big talented nose guard, physical defensive linemen and guys who can run. It's helped. We did a lot of ones versus ones this last month versus our defense to try to get ready, and hopefully it's going to pay off.

Q. Do you play better more disciplined assignment football because of it?

ZACK MARTIN: Yeah, definitely. Going against guys like Manti and Tuitt and Louis and those guys, you have to be on your assignments, you have to be on your technique or you're going to get beat.

Q. How much confidence does that give you heading into this game?

ZACK MARTIN: Yeah, you know, you're going against great players, it's going to make you better. But Alabama has different wrinkles than our defense, but the big thing is to play against a caliber opponent on Monday, and the coaches tried to do that in practice.

Q. Media Day is a little crazy. When you look over at what Manti is dealing with, I take it you don't envy him?

ZACK MARTIN: No, I don't, and I know he's been through every interview known to man, and I'm sure he doesn't wish he was over there right now. But he's a great player, and with that comes the media.

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: It's been great. You know, we've been having a lot of fun out here. At the end of the day, we do got a game to win. So we've got to focus on beating Alabama. It's good to be down in South Florida enjoying the weather, but it wouldn't matter if you didn't win the game.

Q. (Inaudible.)

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: I think stepping on the field is pretty cool, seeing everything around here, seeing the big scoreboard and the Tweets and all the social things. It's pretty awesome. Pretty excited about it.

Q. So much has been made about the offensive line of Alabama against you guys. Do you have any final thoughts as we get close to this?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: I think it's a whole team thing. We all know that Alabama's offensive line is really good. We've got a tough challenge ahead of us. Those guys are let out there by Barrett and Chance Warmack. Those guys are really good. But we'll see on Monday.

Q. Time to man up, I guess?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: Oh, there's nothing fancy about the game plans. Obviously we've just got to keep doing what we're doing. We're not going to do anything different just because it's the next game on our schedule. It's the National Championship game, so we're not going to do anything out of the ordinary for us. We're going to keep playing our game, offensively and defensively.

Q. (Inaudible.)

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: Yeah, we're for sure ready for that. Lacy and Yeldon, we've got a tough challenge ahead with those guys. Lacy is the type of guy that will hit the hole pretty hard and lower his shoulder, get a couple more yards on you, and then Yeldon that guy who will take it outside a little bit and try to beat you with speed outside.

Q. (Inaudible)?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: Oh, Road Trip, for sure. Road Trip. Road Trip. Best show on ESPN.

Q. When you hear that your defense is compared to SEC-type defense, how do you take that?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: Honestly, I just think that we're a Notre Dame defense. SEC is known for their defense, SEC has played great football the past eight, nine years, but we really don't compare ourselves to anybody. We just want to get better every day.

Q. When you look at college football there's a lot of spread, fancy offenses, but what does it say about the state of the game that the two teams here are really tough, physical teams, able to run the ball?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: I think it's going to be a fun challenge. I think it's going to be fun to watch, and I think hopefully the college football fan industry can enjoy it.

Q. (Inaudible.)

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: I don't think we had luck to get here. To come where we are, you have to win some close games. Pittsburgh was a close game, and BYU played us pretty tough. I think championship teams, they're the teams that pull out those wins. I don't think -- that's it right there.

Q. (Inaudible.)

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: I don't know if it was luck. I'm not really sure if it's luck or not. I don't think it's luck at all.

Q. How much better are you now than you were at the start of the season?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: I think we're getting better every week. Especially one thing, Everett is getting better every week, and having a freshman back there leading our offense, it's pretty tough. But seeing him grow week to week is something spectacular. Defense, we've been getting better every week, as well.

Q. Scale of 1 to 10, where were you at the beginning of the season, and where are you now?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: I think we always thought we were good, but each game we just go out there and fight hard. It's not really a scale of where we're at. We just want to get better every week.

Q. When did you think that playing for a national title was actually a possibility?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: We always think that at the beginning of the season. That's always the No. 1 goal. We've had some key wins this year, at Oklahoma, at Michigan State, at USC. Those were some key wins in our season run this year that let us know we could play for a National Championship.

Q. A lot of people who look at close final scores are judgmental about that negatively. You could also say it's a great strength, the ability to close out tough games. What's your view on that?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: I think the ability to close out tough games, that's what good teams do. Past teams that have had some National Championship runs, they've had to win close games. Notre Dame, obviously we have won close games, and I'm pretty sure Alabama has won some close games, as well. You're going to have some adversity through the season, and it's how you prevail in those circumstances that make you a good team.

Q. (Inaudible.)

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: Honestly I think it started when I got my knee injury, and being out the last like six games last year, and this spring trying to work my way back up to where I am now. I think that was my biggest growing point of my career.

Q. How do you think that affected the rest of the team?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: You know, I try to bring that energy, I try to bring that positivity to the team. Sometimes I try to be a rah-rah guy but sometimes I'm not the best at it, but I just try to have my energy try and infect somebody else.

Q. Talk about your year, the patches on your jersey, BCS Championship. I mean, this is a big deal.

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: Yeah, it is a big deal, and it's an exciting time, too. Today I'm really excited to be out here with my teammates. I'm excited here to talk to the media. I'm excited to enjoy the nice weather under the shade a little bit. I'm just out here just trying to have fun and have fun with the media.

Q. Obviously it's every goal, but did you see this when you came to Notre Dame?

KAPRON LEWIS-MOORE: You know what, to be honest with you, when I first was getting recruited under Charlie Weis, the year before I got there was the worst season in Notre Dame history. A lot of my friends were, "Why are you going to Notre Dame? They're horrible." Coach Weis, he challenged our class, "Let your class be the one to try to get Notre Dame back on top." When he told me that, I thought that was awesome. At the same time I thought it's a challenge that could be met.