



NOTRE DAME, Ind. – Forgive Brian Kelly if he was a little tardy to his regular Tuesday press conference. The Notre Dame football coach was doing what every good American should be doing today on this first Tuesday of November.

“I was exercising my right to vote,” Kelly said as he began his weekly media gathering inside the Guglielmino Athletics Complex about 15 minutes later than usual.

While Kelly exercised his right to vote, the one-time politician reiterated on Tuesday that he will not get into politics as it pertains to pleading his team’s case in the race to play in the BCS National Championship Game.

“It doesn’t help,” Kelly said of his rationale for staying mute on the subject. “If it helped I’d be...you know me I can talk all day. If it really helped I would be on the stump for it, but it doesn’t do anything. The only thing that does is winning football games, so I try to spend all my time and energy focused on how we can get another win.”

The Irish almost did not get their latest win last Saturday when they needed to overcome a 14-point fourth quarter deficit to defeat Pittsburgh 29-26 in overtime. Kelly told his team after the win that he was proud of the “heart” of a champion they displayed in overcoming their deficit, but he also implored them to now have the “head” of a champion moving forward.

“The head of a champion understands that each and every week you’re going to get the opposition’s very best,” Kelly explained. “We have to be able to understand that when we play the game on Saturday. As I mentioned, I like the way we prepared all last week (but) we need to play better.”

Kelly says his team, which has had identical 8-5 records in each of his first two seasons at Notre Dame, now finds itself in a new place as it navigates its schedule with an unbeaten record. Just being Notre Dame puts a target on his team’s back, but the 9-0 record that now comes with it allows teams the chance to “make their season” if they can knock-off the Irish.

“This is new territory for them and they’re learning,” Kelly said of his team. “I sensed and felt in talking to our guys that they clearly understand that they can’t play the game any less than their very best if they want to win. I think that message resonated.”

The Irish will need that message to come through loud and clear this weekend when they take on a Boston College team that has just two wins this season. Any Irish fan knows how BC ruined Notre Dame’s national championship hopes though by beating unbeaten Irish teams in both 1993 and 2002. It doesn’t take much for the Eagles to get up for the Irish and Kelly was signing BC’s praises on Tuesday.

“(I am) probably most impressed with how they’re coached,” Kelly complimented. “(They are) extremely well coached, especially on the defensive side of the ball. They play hard (and) play physical.”

Since losing six straight to Boston College, Notre Dame has won the last three meetings between the only two Catholic FBS schools in the nation. That includes a 31-13 victory two years ago in Chestnut Hill.

### **Of Injuries & Illness**

Kelly says reserve offensive tackle Tate Nichols is likely done for the rest of the season. Nichols has battled knee issues this season since the end of training camp. Kelly said today that his medical staff believes Nichols has a PCL injury, but they will not know for sure until swelling subsides around the injury. An MRI is planned at that time.

Kelly went into much greater detail on Louis Nix's bout with the flu last week. Nix first came down with symptoms last Monday, but Kelly says the team was not aware of his illness until Tuesday, when Nix did not arrive until about 30 minutes prior to practice. The nose guard wanted to practice that day, but was not able to go.

Kelly says Nix spent all day Wednesday in the school infirmary and was still not able to "do much" at Thursday's practice. By that time Kelly and his staff were planning on using Nix in last week's game only in an "emergency" situation.

Nix's back-up, Kona Schwenke, suffered a shoulder injury during the game and Nix indicated that he wanted to play.

"When he got in there he played very well," Kelly said of Nix. "He played really gutsy. He was not feeling well. He'd come over to the sideline and you could tell he was not feeling very well, but it was just a gutsy performance from a kid that was sick all week."

Nix finished with four tackles with half a sack and half a tackle for loss in Saturday's win. Kelly says Nix is back to his laughing and joking self and he expects him to be at full strength this week. He did say there are a couple players who have had the flu this week.

### **Building Toughness Starts Early**

Ten weeks (including a bye week) into the season the difference in the mental and physical toughness the Irish have when compared to Kelly's first two ND teams is abundantly evident. The roots to the marked improvement can be traced back to training camp where Kelly made a switch to more live 11-on-11 play than he has used in past years.

Kelly's primary reasoning at the time was the format would help him decide which quarterback, Everett Golson or Andrew Hendrix, would be his opening-day starter. The format would also help his team build needed depth at positions like cornerback, which was thin on experience. Kelly says the 11-on-11 play back in August has paid other dividends this season.

"We ramped it up in the preseason camp," Kelly explained. "We felt like we needed to spend more time going against each other (and) being more physical. Our practices were longer (and) we added more periods to our practice all in the hope to develop more physical and mental toughness."

"This team has played more consistent on Saturday, but the other teams I've had here at Notre Dame have all prepared well (but) they just didn't play as consistent. Now we're getting consistent performance and I think some of it has to do with what we did in preseason."

Kelly says he is tapering off certain more physical aspects of practices as the season goes on to save his team from the wear and tear of the season. He says he will cut back a little more as well now that daylight savings time is here. Saving his team from additional pounding in practice is especially important as well, because of the extended reps his first team has taken during games this season.

"We've played a lot of snaps," Kelly said. "If you look at our snaps, accumulative, with our first team guys versus say some of the top teams in the country – I think we all know Oregon – it's night and day."

The only two games Notre Dame has played this season where the outcome was not in doubt until the fourth quarter were Navy and Miami, while Oregon has won seven of its 10 games by at least 22 points. The Ducks have also surrendered fewer than 14 points just once.

## Going Home

## BK Notebook

Written by Sean Stires

Tuesday, 06 November 2012 15:00

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This weekend's trip to Boston will mark the second for Kelly, a Massachusetts native, since his arrival at Notre Dame. Kelly talked last week about the need for his team to manage their time well in regards to their families and ticket requests for home games, and he says that is a lesson he learned when he takes a team back to his old stomping grounds.

"The one thing is there's a lot of request for tickets," he commented. "I've gotten that out of the way. I've taken care of all of my friends and relatives. They've got their tickets. Now they're on their own. I've taken care of that, but I'm excited to get back there."