



NOTRE DAME, Ind. – It's senior week at Notre Dame. There are 26 seniors who are slated to take their last walk down the Notre Dame Stadium tunnel this Saturday when the Fighting Irish host Wake Forest in the last home game of the 2012 season. Irish head coach Brian Kelly reminded his team this week that they must keep the proper perspective leading up to and during this week's game.

"In other words, yes it is your last home game, but we've got a lot in front of us," Kelly recalled during his Tuesday press conference of his message to his team. "What you'll remember the most is whether you win the game, not that it was your last home game. Make sure that you keep the distractions to a minimum and if there's any emotion let that be after the game."

The relationship Kelly shares with his team in general, and the current seniors specifically, is as strong now as it has been in his three seasons at Notre Dame. There have been some bumps along the way – like the infamous comment last year Kelly made about the difference between players he recruited and those left over from the previous regime. Those days are a distant memory now though.

"More than anything you begin to trust each other," Kelly said of how his relationship has evolved with his players. "(They) trust that everybody is here for the same reasons. We're here to develop them to be the best they can be both on and off the field. "

“I think once they understand that and they know that you’re not here just to get something out of them, you know – ‘I just want to get more football out of you’ – I want to get more out of you as a young man. Once that kind of wall has been broken then it allows you to have some fun with those guys. I think that’s what we’ve seen this year.”

Kelly started breaking down those walls last January and it has continued since then. He spent the first two years with more focus on setting a daily standard of how the team needed to operate to achieve success and that did not always go hand in hand with being close to players.

“That means that you’ve gotta be hard on some guys,” Kelly said of his early approach. “This third year was a year where I knew our guys knew exactly what was expected and it allowed me to spend more time with my players and build those relationships that are so important to having great morale.”

### **Manti the Model**

Manti Te’o is the poster child for not only the senior class at Notre Dame, but for all of college football this season. Te’o’s story in 2012 has been right out of a movie script. He turned down the chance to leave school for NFL money and fame and returned for one more year of school for a chance at team success.

Te’o has overcome personal tragedy this season and finds himself in the middle of not only an All-American season, but also an unlikely Heisman Trophy campaign. Kelly says Te’o’s is a great story, but it is also one that is far from finished.

“When those books are written they’re written about championships,” Kelly said of Te’o’s saga. “They’re written about the great days at Notre Dame. Certainly this has been a great year, but there’s more to accomplish. I think he would be the first one to tell you that this story’s not over with. There’s some more chapters to be written and I think he wants to be right in the middle of those.”

If Te’o would manage to win the Heisman he would be just the second defensive player to do

so. He would also be the first Notre Dame player to win the award since Tim Brown in 1987. If he would win the Heisman and Notre Dame goes on to win the national championship Te'o would become the first player since Leon Hart in 1949 to hold both honors in the same season for the Irish.

Kelly says Te'o is simply a "unique" player who handles himself like no other he has coached before.

"I would say that the one thing that stands out to me is with all the things that have gone on off the field and all of the hype and all of the All-American talk and Heisman talk – he gets better each week," Kelly explained. It's amazing to me."

Te'o is the only Irish player who has such media demands that he has had his own press conference during the week at times throughout the year. He has not had one every week, but he will again this week before the last home game of his illustrious career.

### **Goody's A Good Man**

Another senior who will say goodbye to Notre Dame Stadium this weekend is wide receiver John Goodman. The Ft. Wayne, Ind. native came to Notre Dame with a lot of fan fare, but he has seen his ups and downs in his five seasons on campus. His roller coaster included a 2008 freshman season that saw now playing time as well as various injuries. Kelly says Goodman has given his team "everything he has".

"He's a good teammate," Kelly said of Goodman. "I know I'm measured by wins and losses, but the relationships that he has on this team strengthens that group. I think he'll look back and say yeah I'd like to have caught more and made more touchdowns and done all those things, but he's gonna look back on the relationships and the strength that he has provided as a senior in this football program."

Goodman has four receptions for 77 yards and two touchdowns this season. His touchdown total this year matches his previous four years combined. He has missed three games this year

due to injury as well.

### Personnel Matters

Kelly said Goodman, Daniel Smith and Chris Brown will all likely see more playing time since DaVaris Daniels is out for the rest of the season with a broken clavicle. Daniels' absence will also mean a more expanded role for T.J. Jones, who is already ND's second-leading receiver this season. Jones will lineup on both the field and boundary now.

Louis Nix was ejected at the end of the Boston College game, but Kelly says that will not have any effect on his playing time this week.

After several players, including Nix, battled the flu for the last three weeks Kelly says his team is past the bug and everyone appears to be fully healthy now.

### Winning Is Good For Business

After losing a total of five home games in his first two seasons at Notre Dame, Kelly and the Irish are a perfect 5-0 and looking for a sixth home win this weekend. Turning the home field back to an advantage was a big hurdle to clear in terms of big picture success for the program.

"I think everybody in the program felt that if you want to take that next step in terms of success you've gotta win at home," Kelly explained. "I think we've all talked about the statistics of Oklahoma and the numbers were mind-boggling in terms of their home field advantage until we beat them. We want to have that kind of legacy. We want to build that kind of dominance at home and the first step is winning all your games at home, which hasn't happened in a long time."

The last time Notre Dame finished with an unbeaten home record in a season was 1998. A win on Saturday would also mark ND's eighth straight home victory overall. The Irish are also

shooting for the program's first 11-0 start to a season since 1989 and Kelly says the overall success has made it a "great year" for his staff's recruiting efforts.

"There's no mistaking that kind of success helps you in recruiting," Kelly began on the subject. "Having said that, I think we had made great progress coming into the season where we had a number of commitments already in place. I think the winning has obviously enhanced that and strengthened those commitments. I don't think there's any question that winning definitely gives you a bump in recruiting."

### **A Hot Commodity?**

With the number one ranked scoring defense in the nation, defensive coordinator Bob Diaco's name is being tossed around more and more as a possible head coaching candidate. Kelly says he is all for helping his assistants advance their careers when opportunities arise, but it is not a subject that comes up much around the office.

"You know Bob, he doesn't want to talk about it," Kelly commented. "He didn't come to Notre Dame to become the head coach somewhere else. He came to Notre Dame to help win a national championship. We've got a lot of work left, but if the right situation comes for Bob and he comes to me and asks me to give him advice on it I certainly will."