



Brian Kelly made a somewhat unexpected media appearance on Tuesday. The Notre Dame football coach held a conference call in what was his first contact with the media since his postage press conference after the Jan. 7 BCS National Championship Game loss to Alabama. Kelly is currently on the recruiting trail with national signing day just days away.

The first question Kelly fielded was about his interview with the Philadelphia Eagles. The meeting with Eagles owner Jeff Lurie came just hours after Notre Dame's Jan. 7 loss to Alabama in the BCS Championship Game. Kelly believes the process began soon after the Eagles fired former head coach Andy Reid on Dec. 30.

"Protocol in the NFL is to reach out to the athletic director," Kelly began as he recounted the chain of events. "They reached out to Jack (Swarbrick), Jack called me (and) we agreed that we would not have any contact with the Eagles if in fact we did and that wasn't certain until, obviously, after the game."

"Subsequently, my agent was involved in talking and setting up a meeting with the Eagles on Tuesday when I was in Nashville accepting the American Football Coaches Association Coach of the Year Award," Kelly continued. "If there was anything that I would have done differently it would have been to close that time line relative to my interview and coming out with a statement."

Kelly said he was on vacation with his wife and simply should have released a statement sooner than he did. That statement did not come until Jan. 12. He added the interaction with the Eagles was not a distraction leading up to and during the Alabama game, because he was never certain that he would actually ever interview.

"It really wasn't even on my radar," Kelly said. "So there was never any consideration. It wasn't an option."

In the end, Kelly says satisfying his own curiosity about the NFL is what the entire dalliance was all about.

"College is all that I've been involved in," Kelly explained. "I really didn't understand the NFL process - the game, who's involved in the day-to-day operations of selecting the team - all of those things. Quite frankly, I wanted to answer those so I would have to go through this (again), because we're gonna win again next year and there's probably going to be teams that are gonna have an interest in coaching in the NFL and I want to be able to tell them definitively that I want to coach in college."

The other group of people Kelly must now pass that message along to are Notre Dame recruits. National signing day is just over a week away, so he is seeing many of those players face-to-face.

"I tell them up front that I'm committed to Notre Dame," Kelly said of his message to Irish recruits. "(I'm) flattered that the NFL would want me to be one of their coaches, but it's just not what I want to do. I want to be a college football coach.

Kelly says he first addressed the situation with the Eagles with his team this past Sunday night at 7 p.m. The only other issue regarding Kelly's future that still needs to be resolved is a contract extension. He says he and Swarbrick have had discussions "since December" about a new deal."

"We both want the same thing and that is the long term consistency of the program," Kelly explained. "I think the best way I could say it is that Jack and I are in lock step on how we want

to continue to build this program, so I feel really good about that."

Manti Te'o

Fortunately for Manti Te'o, Notre Dame and fans alike, the entire situation is starting to fade away. Kelly understandably took a few questions about the All-American though. Kelly did not have much new insight to offer on the situation.

"Everything that he told me, every little thing that has come out over the past couple of weeks is what he (Te'o) told me," Kelly said. "I can only go on the information that he gave me versus what we're seeing out there and it was in lock step."

Kelly concurred with Te'o's account that the linebacker told him what he knew on Dec. 26 after Te'o had told his parents. The Irish head coach says his first thoughts were to find out exactly what was going on and to find out if the woman known as "Lennay Kekua" was in fact still alive because of all the confusing information after Te'o was contacted on Dec. 6. He also said he was not involved in the decision making process about whether or not to release any information before the national championship game. The question does still linger as to whether or not the situation affected Te'o's play against Alabama.

"I really don't know," Kelly said. "It's a lot to weigh on the shoulders of somebody. I think we could make a leap that maybe it did, but I think Manti would know for sure."

Te'o's legacy has been altered, at least for now, in the court of public opinion since the story broke nearly two weeks ago, but Kelly says Te'o's legacy as a player is still intact.

"I think Manti will be remembered as a great leader on our football team - on an undefeated team at Notre Dame," Kelly appraised. "He showed the way for how to be a great teammate. His work ethic, his commitment - all of those things. For me, he'll be in my eyes one of the very great teammates that I've ever had in 22 years of coaching. He was special to coach and he did all the things that I think great players have to do on a day-to-day basis."

Injury Updates

Cornerback Bennett Jackson and linebacker Dan Fox have both had surgeries to repair labrum tears in their shoulders since the title game. Kelly said he does not expect either of them to be able to perform in any contact drills during the spring, but does not anticipate any long term issues for either of them. Safety Austin Collinsworth, who had shoulder surgery last June, is expected to be a full go this spring.

The player who had the most serious health scare during the season was Matt Hegarty, who had heart surgery. Kelly is optimistic about the offensive lineman's prognosis.

"We've got great news on Hegarty," Kelly said. "We think we're gonna get clearance for him pretty soon. The procedure went extremely well. He's adapting to the medication, so we fell really confident there."

Kelly was not as confident in fellow lineman Tate Nichols' possible return. Nichols suffered a knee injury during training camp last August and suffered a more serious injury later in the season. The only game he was able to play in was against Michigan.

Cornerback Lo Wood tore his Achilles during training camp, and Kelly says all the reports on his have been "extremely positive" as he continues to come back from the injury.

Personnel Matters

Fox and fellow linebacker Carlo Calabrese will find out soon whether or not they can be granted a fifth year of eligibility with the Irish. Both continue to work with the team and attend classes and Kelly expects a final word once the Feb. 6 signing day is passed and he knows the exact number of the signing class.

Safety Jamoris Slaughter's appeal process with the NCAA continues as well. Slaughter ruptured his Achilles tendon after playing in just three games in 2012. He hopes the NCAA grants him a sixth year of eligibility.

"We just don't have word right now," Kelly said of Slaughter's future status. "It's one of those things that everybody wants to know. I know I want to know, the media wants to know and certainly Jamoris wants to know, but we just don't have an answer at this point."

Kelly mentioned Fox, Calabrese and Jarrett Grace as the front runners to take over Te'o's spot at linebacker next year.

BK Notebook

Written by Sean Stires

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"Those three guys I would say lead right now," Kelly said of one of the top priorities during spring practice.

One of the bigger positions to fill on offense is the one left in the middle of the line by NFL bound center Braxton Cave. Kelly said the three top contenders for that job are Nick Martin, Hegarty and Mark Harrell.

"Those three guys I think will get the first look at it in terms of the center position," Kelly offered.