

# University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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South Bend, Indiana, USA

## Marcus Freeman

### Press Conference



Notre Dame - 28, Boise State - 7

MARCUS FREEMAN: Hard-fought victory. We knew that was going to be a tough team. They just have shown it. They're not the second-winningest program since 2000 for no reason. That was a fundamentally sound, aggressive football team, and we knew they were going to be tough to beat.

Now, we were able to be more consistent. We were able to win the one-on-one battles more consistently. We knew that was going to be the challenge. It wasn't going to be outscheme them and confuse them. It was going to be on both sides of the ball. We have to win the one-on-one battles and we did that more.

Proud of the way we took care of the football. And we got four takeaways which is huge. You win the turnover margin plus-4, you've got a great chance to be on the right side of the outcome.

And so we'll enjoy it. There's always room to get better. I'm sure you guys will ask about those things and I'll answer them and we'll evaluate them.

But today we're going to enjoy this thing. It's hard, man, it's hard. The coaching staff, these guys put a lot into trying to achieve an outcome that you achieved today. I always remind them, like, enjoy this. We'll get back to work tomorrow, but enjoy this because you get 12 guaranteed opportunities, and it's hard to get one. It's hard to earn a victory. Sometimes we take that for granted.

Reminding myself as I remind them, enjoy this, get back to work tomorrow.

**Q. What does winning a defensive slugfest do for you guys in a season that's been pretty high scoring to this point? Is it cathartic, like a big sigh of relief?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Using them big words. It is -- to think where that defense was and how they felt two weeks ago, so after week two, A&M, after week three versus

Purdue, to think about how -- it was a low point for us all.

And to see the way they've stayed committed, stayed together. They worked tirelessly to come up with a better output. And I'm so proud of them. They worked hard. They work hard. And to play that way, to play like they played last week, play like they played this week -- and it's not perfect; it's not perfect -- but to get that type of outcome and the number of points you give up, I'm extremely happy for them.

**Q. I know you don't want to talk specifics about officiating but we did see you get pretty animated on the sideline. Was it one call in particular, was it a build-up of things? And how do you manage it as the game goes along?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: I know Justin. He did our Virginia game last year. He's a good guy. Works hard. They've called throughout the season, they're going to protect the quarterback. And I talked to them before the game. I said, you protect our quarterback. But I've got some questions about some of the penalties you called. And he went through them and was great.

I'm sure he's right. Like I'll go back and look, but in the heat of the moment you want to defend your guys. I don't know what Jason can do. That was the one. The other one I saw, the hand hit the head. They told me, if the guy's hand hits the helmet, (indiscernible) they're going to call it. But it's probably the -- it's hard, he's 300-some pounds. They try to get to the side and not land on it. That's a difficult thing to do.

I have a lot of respect for those guys, I do. It was heat of the moment. They know. I'll never disrespect them. I appreciate how they work.

**Q. I'd ask you if this was a serendipitous victory but I don't know what it means. (Laughter.) What has Leonard Moore bring to this team beyond interceptions to this defense? What did you learn about plugging him back in today and what he does?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: You talk about a guy that's, for I think two weeks, right, he's been out, and haven't been



able to practice much. He's been able to do some work with our strength staff but not practice much. And this week he was able to limit his practice reps. Like, we were able to get him in there but he didn't practice full.

It shows you he's a special player. I don't want to say this too loud because we've got players in here, but practice is important, and we preach how important practice is. Leonard got enough work that he can go out there and do his job. And it's just a confidence, I think, that we as a coaching staff, the team has, when he's out there.

**Q. Can you let us in a little bit on what happened to Noah that knocked him out? And were some of your fourth-down tries a result of him being out, or were you going to go --**

MARCUS FREEMAN: He had the injury two weeks ago. He missed a game, came back last week, was good enough to kick from a certain distance. This week, he kicked on Tuesday, was really sore and was questionable.

He wanted to go try in pregame, and it was a no-go. Yes, it factors into the fourth-down decisions. We've got to continue to build confidence -- I have to make sure I have confidence to kick it from certain distances instead of saying, telling our offense to go for it. I've got a lot of confidence in our offense. We've got to keep building that confidence in me and in those guys. That played a factor into it.

**Q. Along the lines of what Tyler asked about winning a game or not, everything is perfect offensively. I know it hasn't been perfect the last couple weeks. When you have to work through the goal-line stop and C.J. missing Will on fourth down, how did you see your offense respond to that?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: They're competitive. They're pissed. Sorry to say that. They're upset because they're competitors. And they want to be perfect. That's the type of competitors we have in that locker room. That's how I expect them to respond, because when you get upset, you understand there's answers.

If they weren't upset -- man, it's okay; next play -- probably not the competitor that I believe we should have.

They own it. They find the answers. They go out there and attack. You're not going to be perfect, but they executed when it mattered the most.

**Q. When the defense wasn't playing well earlier in the season you talked about marrying up the rush and the coverage. How did you feel they did that well today?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: I felt better. There was still times in the fourth quarter of the game I felt like the quarterback was scrambling a little bit too much for my liking. I've got to go back see how he got out.

But we got some sacks. We got some pressure on the quarterback. I'm a perfection guy. We've got to make sure we get him down all the time. But it's definitely improving.

**Q. You won a lot of games on defense last year. I think today was as close as you've come to winning on defense. Not just for the roster, but for the staff, what's the significance of that, that, okay, we don't need to win in shootouts; we can win holding a team to one touchdown?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: It's what it's going to take to reach our full potential. I don't know what that's going to be. But in order for us to reach our full potential, we have to play complementary football, all three phases.

We're going to need the offense to carry us. Sometimes it's the defense -- and vice versa. Offense struggles, the defense. We've got to be good in the special teams game. This is what a team is. There's going to be days like today when our offense isn't perfect, did a heck of a job, 28 points, whatever. Sometimes the points lie a little bit because we get the ball fourth and one on the 1, we don't score, but you did flip the field by 74 yards. And that's important. We need to have a complementary football team to reach our full potential.

**Q. How much do you think of the defense improvement is just time? Your secondary was as sort of full as you have had all year. Chris has had a few games now. How much do you think time was just part of it?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Time matters, right? There is no substitution for time and experience. But you can expedite that process. I've always said that. We say we can't just trust the problem, we've got to expedite it. We've got to fix the process with urgency. It's a collection of both, the experience they've had in the first five games, but also being able to come together and fix some areas, some issues that we have.

And you have to have them both. You have to have them both to truly get to where you believe you should be. So I think it's a mixture of both in their performance.

**Q. You guys put a lot of pressure on their quarterback today. How much of that was schematic? How much of it was, like you said earlier, winning the one-on-one**



**match-ups?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: They were both. Again I haven't watched it. We were aggressive in some play calls. We had some four-man pass rush pressure on the quarterback, too.

**Q. Tae Johnson, first career interception today, couple of big hits. What has he shown you the last couple of weeks to give him more snaps, and how much trust do you have in him right now?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: He's been starting the past, I think, two weeks, two games. That shows you the confidence we have in him. He's earned it through the way he's practiced. He's been close the last couple of games in getting some of those picks, and it was good to see him get one today. He's a good football player. He's an improving football player, he's a freak athlete, but improving in terms of how he's playing the game. He's got a high ceiling, and I'm excited for his future.

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