

University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

Saturday, October 11, 2025

South Bend, Indiana, USA

Coach Marcus Freeman

Press Conference



Notre Dame 36, NC State 7

MARCUS FREEMAN: It's obviously good to get up here in front of you after a victory. The way they prepared, proud of the way they prepared. It wasn't perfect; I'll probably say that to you every time I'm up here.

But in order to be able to enjoy that victory and know we didn't play our best game, there's plays and there's situations we have to clean up if we want to truly reach our full potential. We have to clean it up. But we'll look at it. We'll get it cleaned up. We'll address it in practice, and we get another opportunity in seven days from now to get back out there and compete.

Really proud of -- listen, it was good in all three phases. It was great to see Noah get back. The defense had two or three turnovers -- I think three turnovers and a safety. Played lights out the second half -- really played lights out for the majority of the game.

Offensively there's some bad, but there's some really good. Like there's some really good. We've got to clean up the bad and what the cause of the bad was, and then we'll continue to get back to work and be better.

With that, I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Marcus, I think that's like eight of the last 10 quarters that you've held the opponent without a score, three turnovers today after four last week. You've talked clarity and velocity. Has there been a moment many practice in recent weeks where you've said, that's it, there's the clarity that's leading to the velocity?

MARCUS FREEMAN: No, I wish I could say there was a moment. There's nothing. There's moments, there's plays, there's execution, there's work. It's just continuously hard work, evaluation, practice, corrections. That's the formula.

There's never a moment you say, that's it. You look back over the season and you say, okay, maybe we changed

add we got some things corrected, blah, blah, blah, but they have to understand it's the work that you put in that gives you a chance.

If they think it's a moment, then all of a sudden they think, all right, we're good now. No, it's the work you put in and the way you prepare that gives you an opportunity to play like that on Saturday and then you've got to go and execute on Saturdays.

Q. When you talk about cleaning some things up, a few penalties, but a few calls that were reviewed today that didn't get overturned or didn't go your way. Since you're not a full ACC member, what's the process for you if you want to send clips in and have them reviewed?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, every Sunday you can -- I think Sunday or Monday you can submit clips in if you want clarification or you disagree with a call, and they'll give you a review.

We do it every week. It's an every-week thing. It's just trying to -- more than anything, get clarification on what you saw, why you saw it, how you're going to call it, and so that's all it is. They didn't have enough evidence to overturn a call or confirm a couple calls.

Again, same as last week; they've got a job to do. I can be upset if I want, but I've got to worry about how is this team going to continuously get better.

Q. Marcus, another efficient day for the offense in terms of moving the ball, yards per play, that type of thing. But when it comes down to those short-yardage situations, what do you think the biggest inhibiting factor is in preventing you guys from doing what you need to do there?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, the 4th and 1, I think that was the first drive of the game -- no, the turnover, the second drive of the game, we had a play called that we've called before. We want to win on an out, and they did a good job. They got the drop-in underneath it, and they stopped us there.



To me it was not -- I told the offense, it's not the 4th down plays, it's the plays leading up to that. It's the penalties. On every drive but one I think in the first half that we didn't score, there's a penalty. I said the same thing after. There's penalties. You can't put yourself behind the sticks. So we have to eliminate that with urgency.

Then the one 4th and 8 or 4th and short down at the north end, the guy covered him, but that's a situation you want CJ to just throw it up. It's a 50/50 ball, we believe Malachi will make that play. That's just a situation on those particular plays, but there's plays in that series that we have to get cleaned up so we're not putting ourselves in a 4th down situation.

Q. When you look at the four-game winning streak, especially as of late, what do you point to the most where you say, yep, that's where we're getting it done, that's why we're getting the results that we need?

MARCUS FREEMAN: You know what I'm going to say. It's the commitment and sacrifice to the process that we have. Maybe I'll say that in a different way. I could just say preparation. But the commitment to what we're asking our guys to do, the sacrifice they're making, the choice they have to make every single Saturday and put team before me, and the choice they have to make Monday through Friday to say I have to elevate as an individual. I have to get better.

If they continue to do that, they'll understand that we have room to grow. This is where we're at. We've got to continuously get better, and that's just -- you have to train your mind to just focus on the moment.

I know a lot of people focus on the big picture, but we can't. We have to focus on what we have in front of us. That's opportunity, one, to enjoy this victory, but now go back to work and improve, and that hopefully will get us this four-game winning streak, the results that we want.

Q. To that effect, how valuable is it to the players to know that if you put in that work, you get the result on Saturday that you want now? If you put in X, you get Y, and it's the Y that you want?

MARCUS FREEMAN: I wish I could tell you it was guaranteed, but it's not. You put yourself in a situation to hopefully get the results that you want. Then you've got to go out there on Saturday and make plays. You've got to go out there and do it on Saturdays, every play. Your focus has to be so locked in on this play, and that's what you see sometimes -- at times if it's a lack of focus, we're not locked in on exactly what we need to do.

But I can tell you this: If you don't prepare the way we prepare, you won't have a chance of winning on Saturday. That's what they've got to understand. That's the only guarantee I can give you. I can't guarantee you that we're going to win on Saturday if we prepare this way, but I can guarantee we won't win on Saturday if we don't prepare the right way. So they've just got to continue to get lost in the work.

Q. KK Smith kind of maybe outside the top four receivers, but what has he brought in practice that he earned the reps today, and what can he give you when he's out there?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I don't know when Micah went down with a hand injury, they told of told me Micah is out, he's got a hand injury, and KK has been a guy that has been practicing at a high level. He's earning trust from CJ and Kenny in practice, and he's committed to being a better player. Today he gets a little bit of that reward.

I've always said you earn the trust of your teammates and coaches in practice way before you're doing it on the game field.

Q. Marcus, this was a really tight game at halftime and then both sides of the ball, really all three phases, you came out and took it in the fourth quarter. What was your message and halftime and what did you see that allowed them to do that?

MARCUS FREEMAN: My message was stop beating Notre Dame. That was the message. You look at the touchdown drive in the first half, and bad technique, we give up an explosive play and they convert on two or three 3rd downs and that's the result. The offense, I already mentioned it, the penalties that put you behind the sticks result in punting the ball or turning wrong downs.

It's easy for me to say don't beat Notre Dame, but we have to continue to train our minds to focus in the right way and go out and execute. They did, and it wasn't perfect in the second half. I think we came out the first time on offense and had to punt, went three-and-out.

I didn't think we came out of the locker room perfectly, but you just keep battling, and you just -- you're going to look at me and say, really? But it's just win this play. That's really it. Your mindset has to just be, I don't care what happened last play, I don't care what happened -- I've got to win this play. I've been trained to win this play, and I've got to go out there and do it, and then you've got to move on to the next one, and that's going to hopefully help you get the results you want.

Q. Turnovers were hard for you guys to come by the first couple games, but that has changed the last couple weeks. How are you doing that?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Man, you guys look for the magic (laughter). Our guys are playing hard. I'm trying to think -- I know Adon had one, and I can't remember -- I think we got good pressure up front. It was the cover two. It was perfect, man. He did his job, had three on the over, was in a great position and made the play. So that's a understanding what you're asked to do play with clarity and execute your assignment. I know Carson had one at the end, Kingston had one, but usually it's the front and the coverage that helps you with all those things, but I guess it was an accumulation of guys executing on that play.

Q. It felt like a really big play in the game even still when the score got lopsided and that's Tyler Buckner's fake punt. What did you see there, and what gave you the fortitude to go for it there?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Well, I mean, I felt conviction from practice that we could do that right there, and we'd practiced it for a while. Shout-out Coach Biagi and the special teams, the staff, the players, the buy-in and the commitment.

We're trying to always steal a possession, extend drives, and I thought we needed it at that moment because we went three-and-out the first drive of the second half, got a false start on that drive by Ashton, and I'm like, we need something, we need a plug and it was 4th and 2 and I'm like, go run it. Credit to those guys for the work they put in from Coach Biagi on down to the players to Buckner. That's what gave me conviction to say, let's do it on this moment.

Q. You mentioned about the defensive turnaround. You gave a lot of credit to the players and the work they've put in. We asked you a lot of weeks about Chris Ash, and I wondered if you could talk about the work he put in in your defensive staff that's worked in concert with the players' effort?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I think what I talked about after that week, maybe it was Purdue, is that there was two options. You blame -- if Chris Ash can blame the players and the staff, and in return the staff could blame him and the players can blame him, or you guys come together, you double down, you fix it, you have uncomfortable conversations and you really work tirelessly to get this thing to a better level, and that's what they did.

He's the leader of the defense. So I'm going to always give him the credit, and I give the players the credit for buying in

and working. Our leadership on our players, our captains like Adon and Donny and Drake have done an unbelievable job continuing to make sure our guys are practicing the right way but their mindset are right. This is our defense. This is ours, and that's the buy-in that I think you're seeing the reflection of.

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