

# University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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South Bend, Indiana, USA

## Coach Marcus Freeman

### Press Conference



Notre Dame 34, USC 24

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I'm just exhausted and I know these guys that actually were on the field are. And I appreciate, I told them in the locker room, the effort they give to this football program to give them a chance to have that type of outcome. That's what it's about. It's about sacrificing for the man next to you because they need you to.

That was the challenge, and they did. And then, you know, it wasn't an easy win. It was a struggle, as I told them it would be versus a good opponent. But they continued to be resilient, continued to run the football, be opportunistic on defense and create some turnovers in the second half, and the result is the result.

So proud of this team. Big victory over a really good program? Win at last for two weeks around here. Going to enjoy it.

**Q. Marcus, 300 yards rushing with a first-time starter at center; you hold them under 70 yards rushing total for the game. What does that say about reasserting yourself as an O-line and D-line driven program?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Have to. We've never strayed away from that. That's our foundation, that's who we have to be. Proud of the way Joe stepped up. Those guards beside him helped him tremendously and the moment wasn't too big. We will go back and grade it and see how we can get better and all those things, but you're not rushing for those type of yards unless you got O-linemen blocking.

Our defense, we challenged them. Let's make them one dimensional. We can't let them run and throw the ball at will. That's what they been doing. For the most part we stopped them in the run game. They had some passes, and that was the challenge. Like let's make them one dimensional, and they were probably okay with us making them one dimensional and they had some success.

But our guys kept battling and kept battling, and that's what it takes to have success.

**Q. Pregame tunnel you looked especially locked in. Even saw you bobbing your head a little bit. To get this win when there is not necessarily another one on the schedule right now against this team, what does it mean to you?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: You know, I told the guys and I reminded myself, you remember rivalry games. I remember my rivalry games from Pee Wee to high school to college and the ones I've been a part of as a coach. They just -- those are games that mean more.

You remember obviously the outcomes, but obviously remember some things you did in that game that led to the outcome. And so they mean just a little bit more because of what it represents for the university, what it represents for your fans, the players before us, and the players to come.

And I reminded our guys of the responsibility we have to go perform the way we did.

**Q. Coach, wanted to follow up on Otting in particular. What did it mean to you guys for him to step up and play the way he did tonight?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, you are going to get the same answer. You know what I'm going to say. Delayed gratification. He was ready for his opportunity because he worked every day in practice. He didn't know when the opportunity was going to come and he was ready for it.

Again it's an example for everybody in life, in our program. You can't wait for your opportunity. You have to work, you have to work, and you have to work and maybe you get this opportunity. Maybe. Maybe you don't. There is guys that work their tail off in that locker room and they don't get an opportunity to get on the field.

At some point your hard work will be rewarded and for Joe it was today.

**Q. You talked about the resilience. Feels like we are**



**asking you the same question after last year's USC game about Christian Gray, the way he bounced back. What did mean to see him do what he did?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Like deja vu. I kind of got on him the series that they scored right before he had that interception. I reminded him, like nobody feels bad, man. You got to do your job and play with the proper technique.

Do I believe you can do it? Absolutely, but you got to go do it. Nobody has sympathy. After that pick he ran over and said a couple words to me, but I like that, right? I like that. And he knows I love him and believe in him and he needed challenged a little bit. Has to play with better technique. He has to.

But keep battling. Keep battling. You got to let the last play go. That's the name of this game of football. You have to let the last play go and win this play. You have to win this play. And that's an example of what Christian did, and we got to continue to do that.

**Q. Coach, you said on Monday that this was going to have to be a bloody victory. The rain probably washed a lot of that away. Do you feel like you played physically in the way that you wanted to?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Oh, yeah, especially the rain helped create that type of game that it was going to be O-line, D-line driven game and be won in the trenches. We weren't going to be able to throw the ball a lot in the second half because of the moisture and the weather, and that's what we want.

That's what we want. That's our edge. We got to play the game in a physical manner that maybe not every team wants to play. Not saying they didn't. Not every team wants to play that way.

**Q. Even without the rain, early on it seemed CJ was a little off. You guys were able to overcome that. He even overcame that to a degree. What does what say about the group to be able to grind it out the way they did?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, be interesting to talk with CJ in our weekly meetings, what he felt. I don't know. I mean, if he knew what was causing those incompletions he would've corrected it. I just mentioned, hey, man, just be you, right? Don't press. Don't make this thing different than the last five or six.

Because CJ is a competitor. He's an ultra competitor. I don't want to him to use it as a negative thing against him. But he's resilient, man. Came back the second half

and really did a good job leading our offense down the field.

**Q. Not a new subject, but how much of your appreciation I guess grown for watching Love and Price share a job willingly and do the things that they're able to do?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I mean, it's not very common in college football, not very common in life to see two guys that are so talented that deserve the ball in their hand every snap, but choose to put the team in front of themselves and then make the most of their opportunities. They're not pouting. They're each other's biggest supporter.

I said this a couple -- but that is what you want your team to be a reflection of. Great players that make great plays when they have the ball in their hands, but continue to put team before me. That's hard to do. That might be one of the hardest thing we ask our plays to do, it put team before me. Everything outside of here says no, you come before team.

When you have great -- when great things happen it's because have you and when bad things happen it's because of everybody else. For those guys to embrace team before me, like that's what I want this program to be about.

**Q. I don't guess you want to Christian Gray's words to you on the sideline?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: I said hold on, man, I believe in you. I reminded him I believe in you. No, I think he was grateful that I challenged him. I'm not saying I'm the reason, I mean, he's a really good player that has to continue to play with the right technique. But that's what family and trust is represented by, right? Like we can challenge each other. He can challenge his coach because we trust each other. We try to get the best out of each other. You can't do that if you don't trust each other, right?

I hope that's a reflection of that.

**Q. The physicality required to sort of make them one dimensional, especially without Rubio out there, what was the key to that?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I mean, part of it was the style of play, right? Part of it was schematically saying, okay, we're going to try to put an extra guy in the box and maybe play some one-high defense and force them to throw the ball.

I think there was both that contributed to that.

**Q. And offensive line, defensive line different program, physicality, the rivalry, how you guys gutted it out tonight, is it as satisfying a win as you've had here?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, but I don't say it because of that. I say it because it's this one. You know, you got to be grateful for these things because if you're not, man -- this is the reward of a lot of the hard work. Tomorrow this reward goes away. It now 11:32. The minute we wake up in the morning our mind starts going to the next thing.

And so if you don't enjoy this team glory, that's what I call it, then it's a miserable existence being a football player or a coach. We have to make sure we enjoy it. And, yes, because it's a huge game, great opponent, rivalry, also because we put a lot of work into achieving this result.

**Q. Billy Schrauth left the game with seemed like a knee injury and he was playing well before and played well after that and went out later. Do you know or are you aware of what pain was playing through? Can you describe the impact he had on the game?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, huge impact, right? He's a tough kid. I don't know what it is, knee, leg, contusion, but I know he was able to get back in there, but hobbled out again, and he was able to lead our team in the fight song. That's what's most important. When we win, Billy leads us in the fight song.

But I don't know the medical diagnosis yet.

**Q. How important, what impact did that JD Price kick return have for your team?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Huge. I don't know what the -- what was the score at that time? I can't remember. So 21-24. We were down; they converted a two-point conversion. They got all the momentum. They are up three points. For JD to -- I mean, it's another version of déjà from two years ago. I am sitting there like, God, I get you, man. You know? Notre Dame, you know, there is something that this -- so I mean, that moment I'm like what it going on.

For him to take that touchdown back, Christian to really reciprocate kind of what happened last year, man, sometimes you go there is a higher calling in all this, man. I'm just proud of them. I really am. And that was a huge play for this team.

**Q. In that same vein, there were times throughout the**

**day people were wondering will this game get played, will it kick off on time. How do you navigate all that throughout the day?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I was kind of told early in the day that maybe the time was going to change, maybe we were going to go sooner, we were going to go later. But I didn't want it create panic yet. I said, let me know when you have definitive answers. And I had a definitive answer that, hey, 7:30 kickoff and we might get an hour in, might get the whole game in.

But I remind our guys once you knew a definitive answer, like this is who we are. We adapt to unpredictable things. I reminded them of Georgia. This is not the same situation as Georgia, but it's the unpredictable things that can happen.

Because that's a reflection of who they were as student-athletes. They are challenged the minute they wake up in class, challenged in football, in campus life. They're used to being challenged and having to adapt and adjust to inconsistent things.

So I wanted to remind them, no matter what happens, this is going to be our edge. We have to have that mentality. They were ready. Obviously we didn't have a delay. Just a little bit of delay to warm up, but it was good.

**Q. What went into the decision to put Leonard on Lemon, and what did that do for your defense, him matching up with their best player?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: I mean, we knew we couldn't let Lemon beat us, him by himself. Every week you come up with keys to victory. First key to victory was we got to be plus-two in the turnover margin. Bam, we go got it. Second one was get got to crush the run game, stop the run game. We didn't crush it, but did a good job there.

Third thing was we got to eliminate No. 6. So how do you do that? If we're saying this is a key to victory, because each week they change, how do we do that? We said, okay, there will be times we have to put our best defender on him. We did that.

People say, why don't you do that every week? There is pros and cons. Because when he's not on him, it's like, okay, are they playing zone? Are they playing zone now? When he is on him, okay, they're in man coverage. So you kind of tell the offense what you're doing until you expand the package, but that's kind of what went into it.

**Q. Your safeties really had some big plays, played physical, had a lot of tackles. Can you speak to your**

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## **safety group?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, they played well. Adon played huge. Good to see him step up and do some thing in the run game and pass game, force a fumble. He's an emotional leader for this defense. We all know that.

Luke had a big game winning interception at the end of the game. Tae-Tae just he keeps showing up. Didn't have a take away today, but he was dang close and really did some really good stuff for us.

Playing at a high level.

**Q. Just one for you: Since we're not going to get to talk to you for a little while, what does the bye week look like, priorities and that kind of thing?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah, I decided to give them Monday morning off. I was going to bring them in Monday morning but they don't know I decided to give them Monday morning off. So bring them in Monday afternoon and review the game and got to make corrections and get better from the game, and then we got to go to work Tuesday and Wednesday.

Then it's fall break, so Wednesday after practice we'll give them a couple days off to get away and come back, and Sunday we got to go back to work and get ready for Boston College.

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