

# University of Notre Dame Football Media Conference

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## Marcus Freeman

### Press Conference



Notre Dame 70 - Syracuse 7

MARCUS FREEMAN: Obviously unique game. I haven't been a part of a game like that -- I don't know if I've ever seen a game like that; 21 points on the board and the offense hasn't been on the field.

But it's also a reflection, and you have to be in the position to make those plays. To block a punt you have to be in that position. So credit to our guys for being in those positions and then taking advantage of the opportunity.

It's tough -- you know, I do have a lot of respect for Fran Brown and his team, and as I told him after the game, like, injuries, they're decimated with injuries but sometimes it takes being low to figure those -- sometimes it's the best thing sometimes that can happen to you as you look back. So I know, for me personally, some of the greatest growth comes from disappointment.

But senior day, we had a special group of seniors that might have played their last game at Notre Dame Stadium. And special shout-out to all the seniors that participated in senior day that were a part of today, the band, cheerleaders, managers, everybody that participated in senior day, just a special shout-out to them.

Good victory, obviously. So with that, I'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Marcus, I know you're going to look through this and find ways to improve, because that's what you guys do, but when you think about getting up 21 without taking a snap and holding the team to basically 200 yards, not giving up points till the very end. And as you guys talk about playing your full potential, how close is today to what you think that looks like?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: I gotta go and evaluate it. The score, I mean, obviously the score shows a dominant victory, right? But that doesn't always mean you played perfect, or it doesn't always mean you played horribly if you

win in a close game.

I don't know how close we -- I mean, they played really, really well, you know. But I still think there's more. I'll find reasons to make sure our guys understand that there's more out there. It wasn't perfect. It wasn't perfect. And we need to make sure that we attack those things and enhance the things we're doing well. But it was a really pretty good performance. It was.

**Q. Aside from the numbers, the touchdowns, the yards, what does Jeremiyah bring to you guys that's beyond those stats?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: I mean, he's a special football player -- we know that -- as you mentioned. But it's a confidence. I think it's a confidence that you have when he's on the field, he has the ball in his hands, when he's on your team, because he's consistent. He's not just this once in a while he makes a play. Like he consistently does his job.

Now, that might mean it's a 50-yard touchdown on this play. But he's a guy that's been so consistent and consistently performs well. So I think it brings a lot of confidence to our team, too.

**Q. I don't know when Jalen Stroman found out he was starting, but if there was a turning point in the game when he gets an interception, touchdown and a blocked punt that results in a touchdown. That's a pretty strong statement by him. What can you say about his response?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: I've been telling him all season, just keep working. He is a really, really good football player, which he showed tonight. We got a lot of good football players in our defense meeting room, our defensive team, in our defensive back room.

He just worked. He didn't complain. He just works. He just works. He just works. And I told him before the game that it's crazy. Like the future is uncertain. We didn't know Tae Tae -- I mean, Tae Tae got hurt in practice punching the ball out, and we didn't know he was going to be out.



I said, here you go, Stro. This is why you work, because at some point here comes your opportunity. And I was so happy to see him that first pick six, like I was so happy for him because it reaffirmed some of those things that I try to make sure our guys know, especially him. And then he blocks the punt. And, I mean, he tackled really, really well.

So it's a great reminder, man, the depth we have in our defensive back position, and it's a great example of a guy that works while he waits.

**Q. Coach, you mentioned how unique that start was. What is it like on the sideline? How do you adjust your coaching for the game when that's the case and your offense hasn't even been on the field and you're like, hey, we still have 55 minutes of football to play?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah. It's in the moment, right? Hey, you pick six. Hey, defense, get a quick sip of water, you're going right back out. You know, you block a punt for a touchdown. Defense, get a drink, you're going right back out.

And then I think they went three and out after that series.

But, again, you're always in the moment. You're just coaching the moment. For me, it's unique because I gotta go from offense to defense to special teams. So I'm like constantly, like, on the field, what's going on.

But they gotta go; quick sip, any coaching points, they need to get back on the field and coach them to win that play. So just a reminder to stay in the moment.

**Q. Most points Notre Dame has scored in a game since 1932. It was almost the second shutout of your head coaching tenure. I know you said you'll find things to show that this wasn't, perfect. But when you win a game 70 to 7, what does that do in the moment and what does it do for a team that has the aspirations that you all have?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: You know, I hope I feel the exact way I feel right now that I did last week. And if we win -- what was Boston College's score? It wasn't a fire or work or whatever, that it wasn't great. But it was -- like this is what I tell our guys. Like I don't care what the score. We gotta celebrate this victory. We'll get to work the next day. We're going to dissect it. We're going to find ways to improve. But if you don't celebrate -- if it's 70-7 or 10 to 7, if you don't enjoy that, like, it's a miserable life, because they put a lot of work into this, right. And it's never going to be perfect, even if you win 70-7.

So I gotta continue to teach them and tell myself to enjoy

every one of these, no matter if it's Pitt. No matter if it's Pitt, no matter if it was last year, the Orange Bowl, like, you have to try to enjoy these, because they're really hard to obtain.

**Q. It seemed like everybody that you put in at safety looked like they could play. Ethan Long had the interception, actually had two.**

MARCUS FREEMAN: I know.

**Q. What can you say about the depth on your defense and the people that you're rolling, and also, if you could shed any light on how long you think you'll be without Tae?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah. I think it's maybe two games at Max, one game at minimum. We'll see. I mean, he could possibly maybe be back for Stanford.

I think we have a deep team in all positions, but they don't always get the opportunity to go out there and perform. And that's what was cool about today is no matter if you played or not, I want them to feel a part of team glory because of the work they put in during the week.

But today was one of those unique games where they actually got a chance to get a reward and go play in the game. And I'm proud of the way those guys that usually don't get an opportunity to play played, and Ethan Long is a great example, to have two of them. He had a couple tackles, like, that's what I talk about when I talk about the standard doesn't change no matter who's on that field. And for the most part, they really, really played to that standard the entire game.

**Q. I know a lot of times we try to get you to pinpoint a turning point in a season and you like to talk about process. But I'm wondering with regard with Chris Ash and the buy-in by everybody around him. Was there a turning point with that process? Was there anything you could point to?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah. I would point to -- it was a week -- it was a home game.

**Q. Purdue?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Purdue. We gave up a lot of yards. And I remember you guys asking me, did you ever think about calling plays; did you ever think about making change. I just remember the moment. Not the questions. I remember that was the moment where we had an option, and they had an option. Either you stick together and you attack it and you just work at it and trust each other and



believe in each other, or you do what outsiders would do and point the finger at one person, and that being Chris Ash, because he happens to be the defensive coordinator.

They have two options. But they all said, we're going to stay together, point the finger at myself -- and I'm talking players and coaches included. That was the point when they made the decision, no, we're doubling down. We're going to work this thing.

Now, it still was a process to do the work, and we still have work to do, but that was the moment, because you have two options. You could just go with the flow and blame one guy or you could say, no, I gotta do my part and we gotta stay together and we gotta get this fixed, and we did.

**Q. Following up on that on the defense, after all that noise around the defense early in the season, you really seemed to be setting the bar for yourself week in and week out as this stretch has come on. How satisfying is that right now?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: You talking about defense or the team?

**Q. The defense.**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Yeah. They've really played consistent, really good defense.

So I think about last week. They didn't give up a touchdown until the end of the game, the last drive of the game, and then they gave up three points when the ball was in the red zone.

And you think about what they did this week is not only are you keeping teams out of the end zone, but you're scoring points now on defense. I mean, they've been as consistent and really playing as well as I've seen.

Now, the thing I think is really great is they're stopping the run. They're stopping the run, which is forcing teams to throw the ball, and we're doing some good things in coverage, too. But they're playing as good as I've been around.

**Q. There was kind of a lot of hubbub a few weeks back about one of Jeremiyah's touchdown celebrations. Does a Heisman pose, does that fit the definition of a Wise Man play?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: You put me on the spot. I always say celebrate with your teammates. You can never go -- you won't end up on Wise Man -- well, maybe you will -- if you celebrate with your teammates. But, you know, he's

earned the right to do that. I don't like the one, the other one you're referring to, but he's earned the right. He's earned the right to do that. So I'll let that one go.

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