

CFP First Round: Notre Dame vs Indiana

Friday, December 20, 2024

Notre Dame, Indiana, USA

Notre Dame Stadium

Notre Dame Fighting Irish Al Golden

Postgame Press Conference

Notre Dame 27, Indiana 17

Q. Al, at the start of the game you have a three-and-out, negative three yards, then the pick, then out of the gate at the second half you get another three-and-out. How important was it to come out of the gate and start fast at the beginning of the game and at the beginning of the second half like that?

AL GOLDEN: Yeah, it was great. I think obviously we played complementary football in all three phases there. The offense held the ball and had some drives and scored. We changed the field on special teams, and then obviously we were able to do our part there, which was huge. The Watts interception was great because it just nullified that, and obviously we went down and turned the field there shortly after. So that was great.

Q. How did this game show how important Xavier Watts is to everything you guys do?

AL GOLDEN: Well, he's just a competitor. He just has a great look no matter what the situation is. He just attacked, executed and finished no matter what. Just really proud of the guys. They just played really well together and really executed at a high level.

Q. Al, even though you didn't have the Howard-Rylie combination for the full game, when you did have them in there, how impactful was it to have that back?

AL GOLDEN: Yeah, we needed that. That meant a lot. Obviously it meant a lot to the run game, and then we were getting off the field on 3rd down, which was terrific.

There was a long stretch there where those guys -- we were in control. They got some plays, but it felt like the guys had a good grasp on what we were trying to get done and executing at a high level, and it started with those two inside.



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Q. USC was kind of an aberration when you look at the season performances defensively. How quickly did you feel like you were done with that?

AL GOLDEN: Yeah, like I said, I didn't really worry about it too much. That was a tall task, to go from Army defense to SC and then face those wide receivers, and I didn't do a good enough job in the transition, and I didn't do a good enough job calling the game for those guys and giving them some different looks.

Those guys executed a lot of different looks today, and that helped us.

Q. We know you're a 60-minute type of guy, every yard matters. What happened there at the end? How much do you take away from that --

AL GOLDEN: I don't. We had the game in control the whole game, so I'm not worried about the end of the game. There's things that we can learn from it. Obviously we've got to finish better and I've got to make some calls there, but at that point, I just didn't think continuing to show elaborate pressures in that situation was to our benefit, to be quite honest with you.

I could have called a better game at the end there for the guys and helped them out.

Q. Marcus was in here talking about controlling the perimeter. How well do you feel like you did that tonight?

AL GOLDEN: Yeah, they did a good job. Just a couple plays, like the tunnel screen, Rod Heard, his play in the tunnel screen, it was Rod, Gabe, Rubio coming from inside, and then Adon, that was tremendous, the reverse, a lot of the bubbles and things of that nature early in the game. That was a big part of the game. We needed to do that.

Obviously we didn't get to plus two I don't think, but we did get off the field on 3rd down quite a bit, which helped.

Q. The benefits and maybe the dangers of extra



preparation time; how do you keep it simple but change it enough that the next opponent --

AL GOLDEN: You're saying for moving forward here?

Q. Just the way you guys have --

AL GOLDEN: Yeah, again, a lot of the --

Q. How do you use those --

AL GOLDEN: Sure, I think a lot of the things coming out of the USC game was -- a lot of the questions the other day were relative to that. That's the first thing we do. I'm sure Coach would say the same thing, just quality control yourself, and can we change this technique a little bit, can we play the post player here. Just little things. I thought our guys executed those changes really well from SC to now.

But more importantly we played fundamentally sound and we played collectively, all three phases. You can't win at this time of year unless all three phases contribute.

Is it perfect? Nope, but we'll get back to work tomorrow and get ready for Georgia.

Q. How does it make you better as a coordinator to have an OC in Denbrock in the building? Do you guys bounce ideas off each other?

AL GOLDEN: Mike knows how I feel about him. I think he's an incredible asset. I think the whole operation here changed when he walked in the door, just his experience, his wisdom, the way he runs it, the way he calls it.

I think all of that, obviously it makes you better. It makes everybody around you better.

As I said, we're not sitting here right now -- again, I'm sure Mike will talk about the other side and they're superlatives, but the superlatives we were facing coming into the game was 44 points a game and 440 yards, and we cut both of those markedly. We can't do that by ourselves. We changed the field position on the opening kickoff. We get an interception, they get a big run.

It takes the whole operation to win these games, and it's going to take that moving forward.

Q. Bryce Young's continued development, how much has that helped to have his presence on the edge, especially in the pass rush?

AL GOLDEN: Yeah, we've been banged up a little bit on

the D-line, which is unfortunate, but the silver lining there is it's forced guys into roles, and they've responded. Bryce is no different. He's the next guy in this evolution. I thought he played really well today. Obviously getting the sack there in the backup situation led to points.

I think he's just doing a really good job of just doing what he needs to do every day to get better.

Q. As the defensive coordinator, to have a home crowd behind you in a playoff game, what did that mean to you?

AL GOLDEN: It was awesome. They were just awesome. You can't say enough. They were just awesome. You could feel it, the energy, and execution fuels emotion.

The first 3rd down and the place is going wild and you get off the field, big, huge. The next time you get an interception, then you're off the field again on 3rd down. So execution fuels emotion, but they were just awesome. I thought the stadium was awesome. What a great environment. Just really, really a great environment. Great to be a part of that.

Q. You talked about Xavier, all his improvement in the different areas. What stood out the most from last year where he's a national award winner to what he's doing for you now late in the season?

AL GOLDEN: Yeah, the three things that -- I think his post breaks have improved, his man-to-man has improved dramatically, and just his overall control of the defense, his operation. It's been phenomenal. There's a bunch of other things, but those are the three that jump out.

Q. There's not a lot of new firsts around here, but to be part of this --

AL GOLDEN: It's huge, and I said that last week. When you're walking around the buildings you see all these things, the banners that are hung and all that, and there's so much tradition and the lineage is so strong and so storied that it's hard to come about something that's the first. So everybody in that locker room, everybody that's a part of it can say that for the rest of their life, which is a great thing.

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