

# CFP National Championship: Ohio State vs Notre Dame

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Mercedes-Benz Stadium

## Notre Dame Fighting Irish

### Mike Denbrock

Press Conference



**NATIONAL  
CHAMPIONSHIP**  
ATLANTA 2025

**Q. I think I've asked you about it before, but the competitive nature of Riley. What are the ways that you see it? I hear stories about the ping pong games. What have you seen from that regard?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Just everything that he does, he competes at. Whether that's his preparation for a game, on the practice field, obviously in a game situation, and then when the guys get in the locker room, I think they compete as hard in there as they do at anything that they do in their life just from a bragging perspective so that they can kind of give each other a hard time about it.

The ping pong games in the locker room are legendary. I think everybody kind of saw probably his highlights of his basketball career in high school come up. He wanted to make sure that got leaked out so everybody saw that.

Yeah, just a really competitive guy. It's fun to be watching him kind of express that and let people kind of know who he is a little bit more.

**Q. I heard specifically about the ping pong, but apparently corn hole, have you seen him play corn hole? Have you seen the ping pong?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I've seen the ping pong, and especially the last couple weeks, we've had a chance, obviously when the guys have downtime in the hotel, there's a little area where they can always go and hang out together as a team. It gets pretty competitive in there. Whether it's Madden, whether it's College Football 25 or whatever it is, I don't even know. Whatever they can compete at, they're competing at. So it's pretty fun to be a part of.

**Q. The offensive line, kind of how have you tried to manage that and put the pieces together? Where's Rocco at, and how's Jagusah?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Everybody has had a good week of practice. We've run kind of several different combinations there trying to figure out exactly which one's best. We'll kind of let everybody know about that as we go down the road here.

I love the way those guys have worked. There's been good cohesiveness between everybody that we've put into the different spots. I know they're excited and ready to show what they can do.

**Q. What about Jagusah gives him the ability after such a long time off to be your left tackle on Monday night?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I think whoever we end up putting in at left tackle, even Jagusah, when he was injured, was never very far from the group, always in the mix, always in the preparation. So I think it's allowed us to kind of be maybe a little more cohesive than it might seem from the outside just because those guys have -- you know what I mean, even through the whole entire year, even the guys that have been injured have been a big piece of this.

**Q. You've been around a lot of different head coaches from a lot of different styles of communication. I'm curious what about Marcus is successful as a lead? Obviously he's very young, but it seems that that does not put him back at all. What do you think of his style?**

MIKE DENBROCK: There's so many things. I think he's consistent with his message of encouraging those guys in every aspect of their life to reach their full potential. I think they identify with that. I think he's a genuine person that, when you talk to him, you feel like you've known him. If you talk to him for five minutes or whether you've known him for five years, you feel like you know him, the real Marcus Freeman, because he's so authentic and he's so personable.

I think that relates to the players of today really well, and they kind of take that in and feel like, okay, this is somebody that I know has my best interests at heart and that I can trust. It allows them an opportunity to kind of give their best to that effort when they've got a leadership like that.

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**Q. How did you see him redirect this team after the loss?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Very, very critical point in our season obviously. The mood of the team and the feeling around the team always comes from the top down. His ability to compartmentalize it a little bit, to analyze it, to kind of be willing to be vulnerable, us as a coaching staff, him as the leader of the program, and look at the things that we felt like we really needed to fix.

Not just that we lost, but why we lost, and what is it that we can change, do, repair to make sure we don't have to suffer the same consequences again. He did an outstanding job obviously of doing that and pointing the team in the right direction, and they've done a great job of following the plan.

**Q. When Caleb Downs lines up, you took immediate measures for the half safety, half linebacker, what kind of challenge does that present for an offense?**

MIKE DENBROCK: You have to make some decisions about how you're going to treat it. Is he a linebacker? Is he a safety? Is he something in between? It's a unique scheme you don't see a lot. I'd call it kind of a little bit of a nest look, where they've kind of got him perched up there waiting to pounce, whether you run it or pass it. He's in a position to effect the game on either side of the field.

Another brilliant scheme by Coach Knowles and their defensive staff, and it's hard to deal with.

**Q. Is there an element of cat and mouse between Riley and you when he's in that position, do you think?**

MIKE DENBROCK: You definitely have to account for Caleb wherever he lines up, but let alone when he lines up in that position just because of his ability, as I said, to kind of get to either side of the formation and make an impact on the play that you're running.

**Q. What's Tyler Buchner meant to the team this year?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Number one, he's been probably a consummate teammate in everything he's been asked to do. Came back into the program wanting to contribute in any way he possibly could, demonstrated every piece of that by his actions. When we got an opportunity to insert him in some specials teams situations as a scout team quarterback, as a wide receiver to help our defense get looks in practice, he's just been willing and able to do a multitude of things to help this football team in any way that he could.

**Q. What are the comparisons when you compare this team to that team?**

MIKE DENBROCK: A lot of water under the bridge since the last one, but I just think the difference in this team to the team that we took -- where was it? Was that the Orange Bowl, or was that the National Championship Game? I can't even remember anymore.

**Q. The BCS Title game.**

MIKE DENBROCK: The BCS Title game, there we go. Thank God.

I think over the course of the time that we spent playing that first championship game to where we are now, the evolution of the program and the commitment to Notre Dame football from the very top of the university all the way through the organization that is Notre Dame athletics and Notre Dame football has given Notre Dame an opportunity to be back in this position.

The decisions they've made to make a commitment to play football at the highest level and make sure the resources were there necessary to make sure that was a possibility, I think is what's led us to where we are.

**Q. The pass play against Penn State, I think it was the longest pass play of the season. Does that have a name? Was it the biggest offensive play of the season?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I think probably the drive to start the third quarter and the touchdown run by rowdy was a pretty big play as well. I think the touchdown run by Jeremiyah Love when he got hit by everybody on defense, including the guy standing on the sidelines on the bench, I think, and scored anyway was a pretty big play.

There was a lot of big back and forth in that game and a lot of big plays, but that was certainly a big play. It was great to see Greathouse get kind of rewarded for a lot of hard work. He's shown a lot of patience. He's got ability to make plays like that all the time. Circumstances haven't always called for it, but he's always been there and will always be there when we need him.

**Q. Does it have a name, a technical name, that play?**

MIKE DENBROCK: No, not necessarily. That just happened to be the read on that play, and that's where the ball ended up going.

**Q. It looked like they had it covered. They had a press**

**man and a safety over the top. You know what happened, those guys fell down.**

MIKE DENBROCK: They fell down because of a fantastic release off the line of scrimmage. I think we caused a little confusion with motion into a stack over there and giving them a look they maybe hadn't worked on as much.

**Q. You guys have now played 15 games, going into 16, what have you learned as a staff about playing this long of a season and what it takes?**

MIKE DENBROCK: When you say that, it just makes me tired thinking about it. I think what we've learned over the course -- and Marcus does an unbelievable job, along with our sports performance team, of keeping up with the data, the workload of the players, how fresh they are, even to kind of looking at the numbers that they have when we do put them in the weight room and make sure that they're maintaining strength.

What's their power output? How does that figure into all this? Fortunately, we've got a lot of people a lot smarter than me making those decisions, but it alters how you practice. It alters how you approach the physicality of what you do towards the end of the season of course. You can't have the same practice week 16 as you had the first day of training camp. It's not quite as physical as it was maybe in the beginning.

But you have to be able to balance the work that you need with limiting some of the physicality but still get the speed as much as you possibly can. It's a little bit of a challenge, but we've got really smart kids, and they understand what we're after and how to get it.

**Q. Are there like specific guys that you look at the data on certain days that you have to back off because they --**

MIKE DENBROCK: Absolutely. That's a daily process for our sports performance team to monitor -- this guy needs a little less today. This guy needs a little more today. We've got to get this guy running out a little bit more today. He's got to reach 80 percent of his max speed.

Listen, I wouldn't even begin to explain to you that I know anything about the technology with that or how they analyze the data, but we pay very close attention to it to make sure we've got the freshest team we can have when we get ready to play.

**Q. You're coaching in a pretty big game. Where are your emotions going into this, and what kind of -- I don't necessarily want to say pressure, but what**

**feeling in terms of calling the plays?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I don't know if I feel pressure as much as I do being excited for the players. The pressure that I put on myself is more to make sure I'm giving them the best opportunity I can for them to have success. The rest of it is -- this is awesome. The atmosphere is awesome, and playing in a National Championship is awesome.

If I was playing against Al Golden's defense on Tuesday in training camp and I didn't do a good job of putting the guys in position to compete against his defense in a training camp practice, I'd be upset with myself.

So I try to always keep the same mindset as far as my mind is on making sure that scheme-wise, schematically, personnel-wise, we've got the right people in the right spots, and the scheme fits what we're trying to get accomplished, and we're giving our guys the best opportunity we possibly can for success.

**Q. You've been a stout offensive line all year. But going against a team that you can't attack like you may not be able to all the time against Ohio State?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I think you've got to do a good job of mixing things up. I think you've got to show a variety of different things. We've been probably throughout the season probably primarily a zone team with a little bit of gap scheme stuff mixed in. I think you've got to be multiple in how you attack it so that they're not just seeing the same type of blocks every single running play that you're trying to run.

Some diversity in what you're doing with the run game, a little bit of misdirection and things like that to try to keep them off balance and keep them from really anchoring down because they are incredibly talented defensive front and you've got to be on top of your business if you're going to move the ball against them.

**Q. (No microphone)?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I remember fall camp and Charles getting his feet wet. He hadn't played a lot of football obviously even leading into fall camp, then unfortunately the injury that happened. I think one of the first questions that we all asked was how serious is it, how long is it going to be, is there an opportunity to possibly get him back at some point?

Then to watch him every day put in the work necessary on the sideline and in the meeting room, just in case there was an opportunity, just in case there was a chance for him to possibly contribute to the success of the football team

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was pretty cool to witness and watch every day.

Coming into the game, the Orange Bowl, and playing the way that he did, I thought was a testament to his preparation and a testament to Coach Rudolph and the job that he does with the offensive line. We'll see how things shake out for Thursday, but he's had a really good week of practice, and really all those offensive line have done a nice job this week.

**Q. If one of those guys do go down, how do you adjust?**

MIKE DENBROCK: We'll have a rotation for our inside positions with someone and a rotation at tackle with someone. It really depends on who ends up starting the game, and then we'll kind of configure the pieces from there. We've worked a number of different combinations all week with those guys. They're all locked in. They're all ready to go. We'll see how it all shakes out.

**Q. (No microphone)?**

MIKE DENBROCK: We definitely watched the tape. I don't know if we're exactly the same type of team as Georgia Tech. I have a great deal of respect for their staff in what they do to generate offense. I thought they did a great job with the quarterback run game in that game for sure.

Everybody that's out there that I could possibly study, I'll study. But you pointed to the Georgia Tech game against Georgia, I thought they did a really nice job of maybe even kind of revealing a blueprint, even though it's not exactly the same blueprint that we use, to give you an idea of maybe how you could not only stay in the game but win the game.

**Q. Can you talk about the tenacity, going for it on fourth down that this team has had throughout the college football playoffs?**

MIKE DENBROCK: It really starts with Marcus and his willingness to let these guys decide the game. It's been obviously a lot of fun to be a part of. I think the guys do a really nice job of understanding how critical those situations can be, whether that's us staying on the field, whether that's our defense getting a stop on fourth down, and what a momentum swing that can be for this football team.

We've been able to take advantage of that in some critical situations not only in the playoff but during the year. It's made a real difference, I just think, in the overall belief and attitude of who we are and what we are.

**Q. (No microphone)?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I think Jaden, to his credit, has been the same guy every day. He's a consummate worker. He comes to practice the right way, digs in every day, hasn't had as many opportunities as I wish he would have had because he deserves them.

Then to see him get rewarded in the Orange Bowl, the ball found him, and it was his turn. We've been fortunate over the course of the year where that's bounced around to different receivers at different times.

If he hadn't prepared the way he prepared every week, if he wasn't in the same positive frame of mind to get himself in that position to be ready for those opportunities to present themselves, maybe the outcome's different, but it's a credit to him for the way he approached it and all the work that he did to get there.

**Q. Has he changed since that game?**

MIKE DENBROCK: There's a little more bounce in his step for sure. I think that's because all he's ever wanted to do was to contribute to this football team's success, and he got a big opportunity to do that, and he stepped up to the moment, like a lot of guys have during this season at one time or another.

Like I said, to see him get rewarded for that, because of his approach, was pretty special.

**Q. (No microphone)?**

MIKE DENBROCK: It's definitely a philosophy. To not necessarily limit one guy or another, but to make sure that we've got the freshest, most explosive combination of backs that we can have at any particular time during the game and during the season, quite frankly.

I don't know that you can ever plan for making it into a 16-week season, but it obviously is a benefit as we move forward that those guys have been able to stay fresh throughout the year and kind of share the workload as much as they have.

**Q. With all this hurdling, do you get a little nervous when you see him take off?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Well, I've never seen him not clear anybody just yet. Until somebody catches him by the ankle and he flips over or whatever, but that's something that I think just naturally happens for him. Some guys it seems to happen, like they're running and all of a sudden they're



-- I've never seen anything like it. It's pretty spectacular to watch. I'm as big a fan watching it, I think, as everybody else that sees it.

**Q. What has been your favorite play you've seen your guys do during the season this year without your advice?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Oh, boy. There's been several. I mean, any time -- we are a quarterback driven system. As the year's gone along, we've gotten better and better at Riley kind of recognizing things that are potential problems and fixing them as we've kind of gone down the road offensively. Any time that that happens where he takes control and gets us against a better look or a better play than any play call I could have possibly made or fixes one of my mistakes that I make, it's a proud moment for sure.

**Q. What do you think the difference is with y'all versus Ohio State compared to last year?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I don't know. I think every year you're a different team. You kind of start from scratch. Obviously the last couple contests have been pretty hotly contested.

They're a great football team. I know we're going to have to play at our very best to give ourselves an opportunity, and we're prepared to do that.

**Q. (No microphone)?**

MIKE DENBROCK: That's a nice way of saying because you're really old. Obviously we've had a nice little run here the last few years. I've been extremely fortunate to work with some incredibly talented football players.

Getting to this level and getting to play in College Football Playoff games in BCS National Championship games and things like that don't just happen because of one person or one thing or anything like that. I'm just so grateful to be in the position that I am and to have the quality of people around me from a staff standpoint, from a head coach standpoint, from a player standpoint, that gives me an opportunity to do what I love to do.

**Q. Marcus Freeman, you understand Notre Dame football has been here a few times. What is it about Marcus Freeman that is allowing them to have the success at this point?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I think it's a couple things. I think, number one, he has completely embraced the University of Notre Dame and the University of Notre Dame has fully embraced him, which you and I know hasn't always been the case 100 percent across the board.

I think secondly the players and the messaging that Coach Freeman has the ability to deliver and the connection between him and this football team is a pretty special thing. I think it allows them to not only trust his process but also kind of dig in wholeheartedly and gives us the best opportunity to continue to be successful.

**Q. You knew what Jayden Daniels at LSU was capable of, but could you have predicted this year for him?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Nothing that Jayden Daniels does surprises me at all. I say that not because it's by some stroke of luck or anything else. I know the preparation that he goes through. I know his process. I know how important playing good football is for not only himself but the people around him, how much pride he takes in helping others be better at what they do and making sure that he's on top of everything and every detail that he needs to be on top of.

So I can't say I'm really surprised by it because I know the work that he puts into being really good at what he does. I'm just really proud of him and happy for him for all the success.

**Q. I wanted to ask you what's the philosophy of getting Riley Leonard, the starting quarterback, into a rhythm?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I think for him in particular it's important to try to get him a throw that he feels like he's got a lot of confidence in early in the game. On top of that, it sounds a little bit probably crazy, but I think he's better when he gets hit. Getting him a carry or two early in the game to try to help him kind of settle in emotionally, I think has been something that kind of helps him get off to a better start.

**Q. Your thought process around this rushing from Ohio State. They've got really good guys, J.T.T, these guys who can make impact plays. How do you plan on protect Riley Loenard in that pocket as well?**

MIKE DENBROCK: We're going to have to hedge our bet a little bit with some of the route concepts we do, give the tackles a little bit of help when we can. Obviously those guys are fantastic pass rushers and really impacters on the football game.

It's not just the defensive ends. Their inside guys, in my opinion, are guys that can impact the game as well. So it's a handful of problems up there. Whether that's chipping the edges or helping with the tight end with nudging on the edge or whatever, we're going to have to have a good

piece of that in what we do just to make sure we give our guys the best opportunity.

**Q. What are the keys for you guys to be able to move the ball against an Ohio State defense?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Let me go back to the Georgia Tech game first. What a tough football team. What a well-coached group. That was a battle. I think all the games that we played this year like that one have helped prepare us for what we're going to face against Ohio State.

Obviously Ohio State, their front seven is tremendous, and when you say, hey, while their front seven is tremendous, I'm not trying to down play their back end at all. Those guys are great cover guys, great tacklers, great at impacting the football game on their own right.

We're going to have to win the line of scrimmage and be consistent with doing it for us to be able to operate the way we need to operate offensively.

**Q. I'm just curious being in this moment again after all these years, what it feels like.**

MIKE DENBROCK: Amazing. I'm just so happy for this group of players, this group of coaches, Marcus, the university. They've obviously made a huge commitment to giving us an opportunity to be successful.

Then for the players to kind of bite down on their mouth pieces the way they have the entire year, struggled, fought, injured, hurt, never blinked, never questioned, never stopped, and just battled. I'm just so proud to just even be a small piece of it and honored to be part of the University of Notre Dame's program.

**Q. Last week the offense did the first half with a struggle and did better in the second half. How much do you guys feel you picked up in those last quarters?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Penn State is a good defensive football team. I thought that spoke a lot to their ability to kind of bounce back. We didn't play our best football in the first half of that game by any stretch of the imagination, but the will to be successful is a theme that runs throughout this entire football team. I thought they dug in at halftime, made some hard decisions about the way they were going to play the second half, and went out and did it.

**Q. Two-parter, have you ever lost an offensive lineman and a quarterback on the same play? (No microphone)?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I don't believe I've ever lost the

quarterback and a lineman or two linemen -- you know what I mean? You're like, okay, what else?

But it's just a testament to the preparation of the guys behind them. Charles Jagusah, Tosh Baker, Steve Angeli, they don't blink. They do what's required. They get in there and battle their tails off. For us to get those three points right before halftime with those guys executing and doing the things they did to make that possible was a huge part in the game.

**Q. Mike, obviously players dream about being in moments like the game they'll be in on Monday. Do coaches allow themselves to dream as well? For you, for Notre Dame to win the National Championship, what would that mean?**

MIKE DENBROCK: The National Championship part for me would mean everything. For this university to have that experience again, it's been a minute. I would cherish an opportunity to give them that.

I think secondly coaches aren't that much different than players. I think it's really important always -- I have to remind myself, just like I try to remind the players all the time, live in the moment, you know what I mean? Just six inches in front of your face, and let's go. That's been the secret sauce to the success of this football team the entire year.

I know from the outside at times it seemed pretty dire, but these guys are unshakeable because of the belief that they have in themselves and because of the belief that they have in just capturing the game in those small instances and winning that moment. When they do, those moments start to build on each other and really good things happen.

**Q. (No microphone)? And second question, is Jeremiah good to go?**

MIKE DENBROCK: The offensive line scenario, we've had to practice a number of different combinations there this week. The guys have done outstanding. We're going to make a final decision here about exactly what it's going to look like on game day here as we get a little bit closer.

We've worked some different combinations there for a reason. The preparation of the guys in that room in particular and their attention to the detail has allowed us a little more flexibility than maybe some people have at times with being able to insert guys and move different guys to different spots when we've needed it. Unfortunately, we've needed it quite a bit this year, but those guys continue to be rock stars where that's concerned and just dig in.

**Q. Is there a specific moment when you realized this team was capable of winning a National Championship?**

MIKE DENBROCK: No, I don't think so. I don't. I know we're capable of winning a National Championship, but to be honest with you, it's all been about process for us. It's all been about earning another opportunity, and we've earned this last one opportunity to try to prove that we're the best.

We're going to do what we can to make sure that becomes a reality.

**Q. When you first came back, you mentioned you wanted -- you thought Notre Dame could win a National Championship. When the reality hit you in February of last year, what did it look like? How steep was the climb? You knew it was going to be a process.**

MIKE DENBROCK: I think from when you and I talked way back when I first came, I think I mentioned it more than once that we weren't going to be a well-oiled machine right out of the gate. There's been times even in the last couple weeks we haven't been that much of a well-oiled machine, but I just love the battle of this group. I love their fight, their belief.

We've just continued to get better, and no moment that we've encountered so far has seemed too big for this group. They just dig in and somebody makes a play, somebody makes a block, somebody makes a run, somebody makes a throw.

I think the neatest part about the whole deal is it's been spread out through the entire offense. It's been the running backs. It's been the receivers. It's been the quarterback. It's just a collection of individuals that have fought their tails off for each other and obviously have put themselves in this position to hopefully bring home a National Championship for Notre Dame.

**Q. (No microphone)?**

MIKE DENBROCK: From a practice standpoint, it's given us some real versatility to figure out which combination is best up front and how exactly we're going to position those guys. Having him healthy, I remember him -- and I said this a little bit earlier -- on the sideline even when he was injured and the work he was putting in just for an opportunity, if it did happen, where he got healthy enough towards the end of the season where he was physically in a position to contribute.

To see that now come kind of to fruition and him being able

to get in the football game and play some meaningful snaps, and not only play some meaningful snaps but be really good at doing it is a testament to him and his preparation and Coach Rudolph.

**Q. (No microphone)?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Based on our sports science team and the analyzing of all that that they've done, they feel confident that, if called upon to do that, he would be in a position to contribute the entire game.

**Q. (No microphone)? What makes Riley so special, and what did you notice that he did right away?**

MIKE DENBROCK: It really starts with Riley with how genuine a human being he is. People are attracted to that type of genuine concern, care, tremendous work ethic. Those are the things that win a locker room over. Those are the characteristics that of course you want every player in your program to have, but especially your quarterback.

I know it was a difficult transition for him. Obviously it took him stepping outside his comfort zone to put himself in the position that he has to try to win a National Championship. Because of the work that he's put in and because of the kind of person that he is at his core has given him this opportunity.

**Q. What's it like going up against a guy like Jack Kiser at practice?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Yeah, he's a pain in the back side, quite frankly. He's incredibly smart, hard to block, gets everybody in a good position.

I have to try to -- believe it or not, as much as I try to have some fun with Coach Golden with some of the formations and stuff that I run, I have to do that for Jack. Otherwise, Jack's going to sniff out everything that I'm doing and know what we're trying to do before we even do it. That's how smart a football player he is.

It's awesome. We've had a lot of conversations. In the stretch line, I'm always walking by saying what's the blitz of the day today, Jack? What are you trying to hit me with today? We kind of go back and forth and have some fun with it.

**Q. How important is the running game to your offense? How can that impact the game?**

MIKE DENBROCK: From a run game standpoint, regardless of the opponent, it's really important for us because that's kind of how we're built. We've got to find a



way to run the football. That's obviously an incredible challenge against Ohio State.

They're the best team, at least to this point in the season, that we've played as far as schematically taking things away from you, having really, really talented football players and attacking you, and then adjusting when you feel like you may have a handle on what they're doing. Jim does an unbelievable job of mixing that up and trying to get you confused again.

We're going to really have to be on top of that. It's going to be a huge challenge to get that accomplished, but it's something I think our guys are committed to. It's something we've worked very hard at the entire season because we know what important piece of our offense overall that is.

**Q. What are some of the things you try to do in practice to simulate that defense so the offensive line and guys that are ready to step in are ready to adjust pretty quickly?**

MIKE DENBROCK: I think it starts with we always -- Coach Rudolph does a really good job of rotating offensive linemen, especially as the year's gone along even within the framework of our practice. We don't go at warp speed, but we are a no huddle bunch. So guys inserting and being pulled out and having to kind of step in and perform is something that I won't say it's a natural thing, but with the system that we run, they're a little bit more familiar with it than maybe some people would be.

I think the different combinations that we've been forced to play throughout the year with different guys starting at a position and then maybe someone getting injured, and we have to move this piece over here, and that one over here has allowed us to maybe get some experience that maybe they normally wouldn't have gotten throughout the course of the entire year, which allows us to be maybe just a little bit more flexible than some people could be.

**Q. When guys kick out, the guards and tackles have to do that, what do you think is generally the most difficult part of that potential transition?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Just the playing in space. You feel like you're a little bit more protected at guard because you've got somebody on either side of you to kind of give you a little boost if you need it. Tackle can be a lonesome place to line up and play at times, especially if you've got the talent that Ohio State has on the edge of their defense.

**Q. When guys have to shuffle around to different positions and that, how do you simulate that? Does it**

**require different types of communication than a regular play?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Yeah, for sure. We're obviously always mindful of what gives us the best opportunity to be successful. If you've got someone that you've bumped from guard to tackle and they haven't worked there much that week, that can be a challenge on certain schemes that you're running.

So you have to be mindful of all those things as a play caller, make sure you're taking those things into account. It all influences what you call, when you call it, and why you call it.

**Q. (No microphone)? I just talked to Coach Freeman, and I wanted to hear what you had to say. You've faced so much adversity, what's it like getting up off the mat when you guys have been down. How have you just been so good at responding to that adversity all year?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Leadership comes from the top down. It starts with Coach Freeman and runs through what I consider a tremendous coaching staff that obviously follow through on the message.

Then when you have a locker room full of Notre Dame players and Notre Dame men, that's the type of character it takes to be successful at Notre Dame as a student, let alone as a football player. And to watch that kind of as the year's gone along and all the adversity that these guys have gone through kind of foster and blossom and get to the point where you end up with a football team that they just believe they're going to find a way to get it done. It's pretty fun to be a part of.

**Q. Going back to that Sugar Bowl against Georgia, the last 30 seconds of the first half, first 30 seconds of the second half, how do you use the special teams to get a move like that against a coach like Kirby Smart?**

MIKE DENBROCK: The special teams -- I mean, obviously the defense played incredible in that football game, but the boost we got from the special teams score, you can't even measure those things because you don't really even -- from the offensive side of the ball, speaking specifically, you don't even take those things into account that they -- you hope they happen, but you can't really count on them happening, and when they do, you've got to be ready to capitalize.

I think that's really what this football team has done the best of anything throughout the year is when people have made mistakes, we've been able to capitalize on them and



turn them into a real positive for this football team.

**Q. I asked Jim Knowles if he'd ever seen you across the way in a game, and he didn't think so.**

MIKE DENBROCK: No, I don't think so.

**Q. What's it like, quite the assembly of coordinators. Do you guys know each other? What does a Jim Knowles defense mean to you?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Listen, I've been fortunate to not have to face Jim's defensive structure over the years, but an incredible amount of respect for him and their whole defensive staff. Their guys are not out of position. They're incredibly technically sound in what they ask those guys to do.

They use their players to the strength of their football players, and I don't know that there's a bigger compliment that you could pay another coach than their guys are in position to make the plays because of the way the coaches scheme their defense and give those guys an opportunity to be in those positions.

So just an incredible challenge. I've watched Jim's defenses from afar for quite a few years, and it's going to be an incredible challenge for us. Just excited for the matchup, and we'll see what we can do.

**Q. (No microphone)? Also, Tosh Baker, a guy who's played a critical role in your offense.**

MIKE DENBROCK: Let's start with Tosh. Just so happy -- you're not happy that someone got injured so he got an opportunity, but for him to embrace the opportunity and go out there and just battle his tail off and be rewarded for the guy comes to work and prepares every day. He's not like, well, I'm probably not going to get my -- every day in the meeting room, on the practice field, putting himself in a position where, if called upon, he was ready to respond. I thought he did an incredible job of that. I was so happy for him to get rewarded.

It's really the same story with Steve to a large extent. Steve, his preparation, the way he studies the game every week just in case. Then for that to happen in such a critical point in the game and for him to just go in there like clockwork, methodical, focused, on top of it, and lead us down for a field goal, that drive in particular, I think, probably ranks in Notre Dame lore somewhere as something that was incredibly important, especially if we're in a position to finish the job on Monday night.

**Q. You probably have ideas for plays that Steve could**

**run, but that was something different.**

MIKE DENBROCK: Not necessarily because Steve always always been a talented thrower of the ball. So that situation in particular, I'm not going to say it was maybe a little bit easier from a play caller standpoint, but it was definitely one that I knew there wasn't anything in our two-minute package that he couldn't handle or didn't know inside and out and could execute at a high level, and that's exactly what he did.

**Q. Just a question about Mitchell Evans that maybe people don't see. What's his role, kind of some of the things he does that maybe not everyone sees up front?**

MIKE DENBROCK: Mitch is a contributor in all aspects of our offense, whether that's on the perimeter in the passing game, and he's made huge impacts, especially down the stretch here, huge plays in the passing game.

Then he's really upped his ability to be a physical presence in the run game and giving us the ability to not have to swap personnel and do different things like that to be effective running the football because of the commitment that he's made to really take his run blocking game to another level.

So I think he's a complete football player that can really be a problem for defenses for sure.

**Q. How impressive is it, considering the knee injury and now he's playing a little bit more extendable maybe with Cooper out, the amount of snaps that he's playing at this point in the season and the value behind that?**

MIKE DENBROCK: He was not himself early in the season but was out there giving everything he had for the football team. I think, as the year's gone along, his health has improved and improved and improved, and now I think we've got the best version of Mitch that we've had throughout the entire season, which is good for us and it's good timing obviously.

Then you add on top of that Cooper going down and losing that element of our physicality on the edge of our offense and Mitch stepping up and being in a position from a physical standpoint to be able to step in and fill some of that role has been a tremendous part of our success.

**Q. Coming from LSU to Notre Dame, obviously completely different personnel. How much fun have you had this season getting creative with your offensive playbook and doing things differently this**

## year than you have in the past?

MIKE DENBROCK: I think it always starts with me with, okay, what is our personnel? Where are we? And what do they do best? Then kind of build it out from there.

At LSU, that was we had a pretty good quarterback, and we had some pretty good wide receivers. That was let's launch it a little more. Let's get a little more aggressive with what we're doing.

Here we were a little bit more built offensive line, tight end-wise. That was kind of the style that they played here over the last few years. So it kind of gave us a leg up in that area, not that we don't want to be able to throw the football and be explosive. That's got to be a piece of whatever you do offensively.

But playing to the strengths of the personnel that you have, I think is a really important piece of the whole deal, and that's kind of where we started with this group.

I love the evolution of how we've been able to kind of loosen up a little bit as the season's gone along. So I think it makes us a lot harder to defend overall.

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