

# CFP Semifinal presented by Capital One: Alabama vs Notre Dame

Sunday, December 20, 2020  
Arlington, Texas, USA

## Coach Brian Kelly

Notre Dame Fighting Irish

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Kelly. Coach, an opening remark about playing in the semifinal game.

COACH KELLY: Certainly we're very excited about playing in the College Football Playoffs and certainly the Rose Bowl. On behalf of our president, Father Jenkins, and our athletic director, Jack Swarbrick, our entire staff and team, it's a great honor and certainly looking forward to it.

And congratulations to the University of Alabama and Coach Nick Saban for an incredible year. And we look forward to a great challenge. And excited to, again, for us first time for me and -- personally to be in the Rose Bowl and back in Dallas.

**Q. Obviously you talk about a challenge, and Alabama's offense has been a challenge for pretty much every team they've played this year. Do you just have to limit them or is there any way, game-plan wise, obviously it's early on, but what do you see so far in that offense?**

COACH KELLY: I haven't really got a chance to evaluate how we would game plan them. Certainly, as you said, I followed all of their scores. And they have been a buzz saw against everybody. So, I would think that there would have to be some ball control, which we can play that kind of game, certainly. And limiting big plays, right? You gotta make them earn it all the way down the field.

So, those two components would certainly, I would think, after I get a chance to watch some film tomorrow, be part of the game plan, which is, again, you know leaning on our offensive line to have some ball-control elements. And certainly from a defensive standpoint, making sure that we limit the big chunk plays.

**Q. Wondering about the decision to practice over Christmas. Was it a hard decision to not let players go home for Christmas? How did that dynamic work?**



COACH KELLY: Yeah, it's very difficult. Our roster -- our players, we have as many from California as we do from any other state. So the logistics would be virtually impossible for us because of our roster and where everybody is from. If they were within a few hours where they could drive, we certainly could make this work.

But virtually all of them or at least a great percentage of them would have to get on planes. And so getting them on planes, the logistics of doing that, for us, because of our roster makeup, makes it virtually impossible.

**Q. When you played Alabama years ago you had a certain type of personnel, and all coaches evolve. So how has your personnel evolved with this roster? And then can you speak and give us some indication of Kyle Hamilton, his value to the team?**

COACH KELLY: We've certainly evolved since 2012 in terms of our roster. It's a deeper roster, more physical on both sides of the ball. There were certainly some very talented players on that 2012 roster. In fact, some of them are still in the league doing quite well.

But I think overall the depth of the roster, the ability to make plays on both sides of the ball and, quite frankly, just the size and physicality on both the offensive and defensive line is a probably the biggest departure from 2012.

Kyle Hamilton is a playmaker. And you need playmakers on both sides of the ball. We generally talk about playmakers in terms of the offense, but he clearly is one of our playmakers on defense, and we're going to count on him in a large degree to continue in that pain against a great offense in Alabama.

**Q. So before the Rose Bowl was moved to Arlington, you had expressed several concerns about parents not being able to travel to California and watch their sons. But was there ever a concern about the current infection rate in LA County and whether it would be safe for your players and your staff to travel there at all? And given that the infection rate in Tarrant County, where the Rose Bowl is relocating to, is even**



**higher, is that a concern for you at all?**

COACH KELLY: I really -- I didn't know the numbers. I was really much more concerned because the season for us has been one with virtually no fans or whatever the CDC guidelines were for that particular area. For example, in Boston College we didn't play with any fans. But the families were greeted by our players after. So this was really about getting the families to see their sons play, especially because they were going to have to sacrifice during the holidays as well.

So, it really wasn't about for me in terms of the people in the stands and fans. We're in a pretty good bubble in terms of our testing. We have to test virtually every other day. So, we felt comfortable with our team coming into any environment relative to our testing procedures and staying in a bubble because we just would fly in essentially for the day and the next day and play the game. So this is really strictly about the families being able to attend.

**Q. I know we talked about this over the years; you felt that your team was close after the semifinal loss a couple of years ago to Clemson. Wondering, obviously, where do you feel you're at now having beaten Clemson once, having yesterday's result, going against obviously the No. 1 team in this game?**

COACH KELLY: Yeah, we've got a really good football team. We didn't play up to our capabilities yesterday. And Clemson played very, very well. We didn't play with the same edge. We didn't play with the same kind of tenacity necessary in a championship game. That's on me. I've got to get our team to play better in that moment.

But there wasn't this gap of physicality that had been there in the past. So we've got to play with certainly a higher level of urgency. We've got to have guys step up and make plays. We've got -- playmakers have to make plays. Clemson stepped up and made plays. We just didn't make enough plays.

So certainly capable as a football team to go in and beat anybody on any given day. That probably wasn't the case a few years back. But we've got to play up to our level. And that will be the case going against a great Alabama team.

**Q. I was curious, 2012 Alabama was a bit of a model, taught you, okay, I need to get deeper and have maybe bigger on the lines. I know you haven't gotten deeply into Alabama this year, but how much have they evolved from the 2012 group that you saw? How has their style of football maybe gone up a level or two since then?**

COACH KELLY: Well, at first glimpse it's the proliferation of talent on offense certainly at the wide receivers positions, running back. I would certainly say they're probably where they are and continue to evolve at the offensive line. I think they're number two and number three running backs are as good as anybody in the country.

I think from that standpoint I would probably point towards great quarterback play -- not good quarterback play, but great quarterback play. And then the skill players, in particular the wide receivers that have really elevated the explosiveness of these Alabama offenses.

**Q. Can you update us on the status of Kyle Hamilton with his injury yesterday? And also, are you going to go forward with Josh Lugg at center?**

COACH KELLY: Injury report today, everybody's where we thought they would be with nothing that would keep them out of playing in two weeks. There's some nagging injuries. Kyle's is the nagging injury, it's the ankle. But with good treatments, you know, he'll probably be back out middle of the week. But we've got to monitor him and make sure we get him back. He's an important piece.

But nobody really that we feel like wouldn't be able to play. We'll be careful with the guys. They'll have some time off here as well.

You know, Josh, yeah, moving forward we'll continue to make that a competitive situation. I would not say right now after watching the film that Josh had a subpar game at all. There were a number of different breakdowns from the running back position to any singular player on the offensive line.

So Josh would not be guy that we would single out and say we were ineffective running the ball because Josh Lugg did not play well. But having said that, there will still be competitive reps for him and Zeke at the center position.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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