

CFP Semifinal at the Rose Bowl Game presented by Capital One: Alabama vs Notre Dame

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Arlington, Texas, USA

Ian Book

Notre Dame Fighting Irish

IAN BOOK: We'll get started with quarterback Ian Book.

Q. When Clemson flattened out their pass rush against you and took away some running lanes, what can you do -- you personally and the offense in general -- to offset that? And also Alabama has shown a little bit of weakness at times on third down. How do you guys take advantage of that?

IAN BOOK: The first one is just going to get through the progressions. Obviously Clemson did a nice job of that of keeping me in the pocket. And I felt that and knew that and tried to fix that in the second half -- just wanted to stay in there a little longer and go through the progressions.

And that's what I've got to do this week as well, on Friday against Alabama. They've got a really athletic defense. And they'll probably do the same thing. So when it's open, take it. I've talked about it before. It's a fine line of knowing when I can run and knowing when to stay in there. I've been working on that all year. And I'm just going to try to display that on Friday.

And what was the second question?

Q. Alabama has struggled a little bit on third down. Giving up 40 percent conversion rate. How do you take advantage of that?

IAN BOOK: Just about being consistent. We've got to focus on the small details. We hurt ourselves in the ACC Championship game by not really focusing on the present and maybe looking in the past at bad plays looking too far in the future what we need to do.

We have to focus one play at a time, especially on third down. And the rest will take care of itself. And third down is huge. It's about situations. And we've been focusing on that these two weeks with our team and with our offense.



And understanding situational football and how to react and the best plays for that, the best way to execute certain plays.

So third down is huge. It's how you win games. We want to win that third-down battle. And that's what we plan on doing.

Q. First, the mustache, what's happening on your upper lip? And my second question, my real one, is Alabama really presses. Their cornerbacks are so, so physical and you don't get a lot of space. How do you know what's open and be very specific with your throws and your windows knowing how they press and play?

IAN BOOK: First one is I will be shaving this mustache. It's just for fun. Just left it just cuz. I'm actually going to get a haircut and shave in the next day or so.

And second, obviously Alabama's defense is really good. Their corners do an excellent job of pressing and just doing really good at man coverage. And it's about timing routes. It's about understanding where our guys should be at the right time and trust.

It's about chemistry we worked on this whole entire year. And now it's time to go display that. And I believe in our guys and I respect their guys. I understand what they can do and I've seen it this whole entire year. So it's going to be a great matchup. And that's what you ask for in these games.

Every team is talented. So you can't get away with much. It's about focusing every single play and the small details will really, really matter. And whoever can focus on those small details the whole entire game, every play will end up winning.

Q. Other than the obvious that he's a 6'6" guy who can hurdle defenders, what made Michael Mayer so easy to trust so early in the year, especially on third down?

IAN BOOK: Just the way he carries himself. From the first day I met him, he's someone that just wanted to come in



and learn everything immediately. That's huge. Sometimes a freshman might want to take a back seat. It wasn't Mike. He came here. He can do everything.

He's just fun to be with. He cares and I think the care factor is everything, especially when I'm the old guy here and to see a freshman come in and just want to learn immediately.

He's somebody I trust from day one. And he was somebody that was begging me to go out and run routes. And that's what you want as a quarterback. So excited for him. Excited for his future. He's somebody I trust. Obviously third down has been big, but every down Mike can really win. I believe those 50/50 matchups, I'm really confident that Mike can go up and get the job done.

Q. Circling back to the cornerbacks of Alabama, Coach Rees and Coach Kelly were very complimentary of Patrick Surtain. What is the fine line when someone is that talented in terms of testing him and the trust factor against some kind of discretion? And do you come off a corner a little quicker when he's that good in his progressions?

IAN BOOK: Yes, he's really good. No doubt about that. Just means you've got to be on time. If you're late, he's going to take it. And he's a really good corner who is going to play a lot of football for a lot of years in the future.

So you've got to be on time. You've got to be confident that you made the right read, the right choice. And then at the end of the day, you've got to trust your receivers to go out and help you out.

And that's really what it's about. You can't really be lackadaisical, and you can't be late. And you don't want to find that out the hard way.

But we know he's there. We know how he plays. We studied a lot of film on him. So it's going to be really good. I'm not saying you can't throw the ball there ever. But he's just a really good corner. No doubt about that. It's about being on time. Especially from my perspective as a quarterback.

Q. Wanted to ask you about -- going back to 7on7 days with Najee Harris and just sort of what you got out of that experience of playing with him, but also just sort of leading a guy who was already sort of five-star All everything back then, what you got out of that as a player?

IAN BOOK: Yeah, he was -- first off, he's just a great kid from day one I met him. He's an awesome guy to play

with. And I just remember going down to LA and having 7on7 tournament, and the plan was if we were ever down, you just throw it up and Najee would go catch it. He was playing receiver for us. And he did that. That's how we were able to win some games.

And he was by far the best player I've played with at that time. There's no doubt. And he is still one of them for sure. He's an unbelievable player. Really good person. Happy for him. He'll be playing a lot of football in the future as well.

And our defense has got to step up. It's a great challenge for us. I think our guys are excited for it. But just to be able to play with him, when he was a five-star big name recruit, to be on our seven-on-seven team together was awesome. And it was really just a 50/50 ball. Just throw it up to Najee and he'll go get it. And he did that pretty much every time. And it was good.

Q. You had a chance to be around other players being recruited such as Najee Harris. When you're approaching Alabama, have you ever given any of these players you met across the country who competed against Alabama a call to get an extra edge? You receive all the information from your coaches and everything, obviously. But have you ever called some of these players that have competed against Alabama? And is there any other team besides Clemson that might remind you of Alabama that you played against?

IAN BOOK: I would say -- I mean, I haven't played Alabama yet. But I would say probably Georgia, is my guess. I think they play a similar type of football. And we were able to play Georgia last year. So that was an unbelievable matchup. Weren't able to come out on top on that one. But again, I think they play similar. And I haven't reached out to anybody, no, to see who has played Alabama. But watched a ton of film with coaches. And we know what they're capable of. They're a really good team. We're just excited for the matchup. And just to be able to play Alabama at the Rose Bowl and be one of the four teams that has the opportunity to win a National Championship is everything that we wanted this year.

We've got two goals: One is to graduate and one is to win a National Championship. So we are here. We have that opportunity. And we just feel fortunate enough to get that shot, and we want to make the most of it.

Q. You were able to help lead this program to the playoffs your first year as a starter. Now as a fifth-year, you're back in the playoffs. I'm curious what it means to you to be able to finish your college career on this stage and what it would mean further to finish it

off the way you want to.

IAN BOOK: Just fortunate to be able to be in the playoffs twice in my career is unbelievable. We've just got a good program here at Notre Dame that gets it done. And we've got to go finish it, though. We were able to make it there in '18 and get close, but we didn't finish the deal. And we get another opportunity now with a lot of guys on the team who played in that game who are now older, more mature, better leaders, better football players. And now we get that chance.

And we want to finish it the right way. We had a bad taste in our mouth since that '18 game for a lot of the guys that played in it.

So just to be able to end my college career at the biggest stage. I mean, the Rose Bowl has been a game I've been watching since I was a little kid. And just to be in the playoffs. We want to finish it the right way. We truly have an opportunity, and it starts with believing. We believe we can win. We believe that we can win a National Championship this year. And that's where it matters and that's where it starts. And it's just an unbelievable opportunity for this team.

And these guys believe. It's been a couple weeks of preparation. We're just excited to get out to Dallas, go play on the biggest stage. That's why you come to Notre Dame. We're here and we're ready to do it.

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