

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

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Arlington, Texas, USA

Drew White

Notre Dame Fighting Irish



THE MODERATOR: We're going to continue with Drew White.

Q. Coach Lea just called you maniacal on the field and said at times you black out while you're playing and just kind of go play. I want to hear more about this. Where does that come from with you?

DREW WHITE: That's something I've had kind of my whole career playing football. I'm sure a lot of guys on the team as well can attest as well that I have a different personality off the field than what I have on the field. Coach Kelly talks about your optimal zone and how some players have to play relaxed and some players have to get up to high tempo and high spirit to play well.

I need to get myself excited and, I guess, maniacal to play well. It's just kind of how I've always been. I get on the field and have to play up tempo. And it helps me play well.

Q. The results stopping the run the last two games maybe not the same as throughout the rest of the season. As you've looked at the film, has anything stood out the last two games that's changed? And also offer a thought on what you've seen on the film of the Alabama run game led by Harris?

DREW WHITE: Alabama has a good blend of passing offense and a run offense. So that's something we're dialed in. And the first thing we'll have to do is stop the run.

So looking at it from Clemson -- from the last Clemson game, the ACC Championship, I think it was more of just not being disciplined and being gap-sound. So that's kind of what we've been preaching.

This week is to not make the game bigger than what it is. We've been able to stop the run for most of the season.

So, nothing has changed. It's being disciplined, being gap sound and trusting the other ten guys on the field that they'll be in the right position as well. Just do your job, and that's what we're going to have to do in the Rose Bowl.

Q. I want to ask a scouting-report question. Just looking at the Alabama offensive line, as you guys prepared for them, what do you see from them and what kind of challenges does that unit present defenses?

DREW WHITE: They have a really good O line, probably one of the best we've seen this season. We want to be physical at the point of attack. And that's really been our identity as a defense this whole year is being physical, playing downhill.

They have a really good offensive line. They're big. We've seen similarities with Georgia's offensive line last year. It's going to come down to being physical at the point of attack.

Q. What's it been like playing alongside Jeremiah? And how have you been able to help one another?

DREW WHITE: I've been able to play with Wu the past two years, and he's an electric linebacker, really rover-y, can do both, he can cover and play in the run as well.

He's an electric player. He's a guy that can change the game. We saw that in our first Clemson matchup when he just took the ball and scored a touchdown.

It's awesome to play next to him and really excited to have another opportunity to play against him. He's a great player, obviously. You can see all the great awards, the Butkus Award, that he's gotten. And it's been a blessing to play next to him.

Q. Coach Lea I think often says you want to make an offensive play left-handed. You've done that successfully whether it's Etienne in the first game against Clemson or Michael Pittman last year against USC. Can you make Alabama play left-handed when they have as many different options as they do?



DREW WHITE: Yeah, they're definitely not one-dimensional. They have a really good passing game and a really good run game as well. I think the focus is to make them snap on the ball as many times as possible and limit the big plays.

That's something that we got away from in the ACC Championship game against Clemson. We had too many explosive plays. So really if we're disciplined in the back seven and then disciplined in our run defense as well and be gap sound, I think we can limit their explosive plays, which will make them have to drive the ball and have long drives.

And I think at that point it gives us more opportunities to make big plays and get negative-yardage snaps and make them get behind schedule.

Q. As a freshman you were on the scout team with guys like Jafar Armstrong, Aaron Banks and they just mentioned Jeremiah. What does this class of 2021 mean to you and what separates you guys from the rest?

DREW WHITE: I definitely think this team is special because of the brotherhood. I'm sure you've heard of that. But this is a really close-knit group of guys that care for one another, that go out there and don't play for themselves. They don't play for the stat line. They don't play for the awards. They play for each other.

That's really what makes this group special. We're extremely close off the field, which is really important through the year of 2020, with COVID and the lockdowns and quarantine. And it really started in March when we were all sent home, and we're on the Zoom meetings just with each other holding each other accountable. That's what really started this special team and now we're one of the top four teams in the country looking to go to the National Championship.

I think the brotherhood and camaraderie is really what has propelled this team forward.

Q. Following up on that, I'm sure for a grad transfer like Nick McCloud to come into an already close-knit team in the middle of a pandemic when you guys aren't around each other as much is a difficult thing for him. But what do you notice about his ability to acclimate and be part of that brotherhood, like you said, in a pretty seemingly seamless manner?

DREW WHITE: Nick came in in the summer and immediately gained respect from a bunch of guys on how hard he worked in the workouts and how he was a leader

on and off the field.

So he had a really smooth and seamless transition to the defense and immediately got the respect that he deserved and should be credited for. So he's been great for us on defense and locking down at the corner position.

So, yeah, he was a great addition to the defense.

Q. Are you guys tired as players of hearing this national narrative that Notre Dame does not belong in this game?

DREW WHITE: I mean, I think for me, personally, I think for a lot of the guys, sure, we hear it. We're aware of the noise, we call it. But it's really just about the guys in the locker room and about the brotherhood that I touched on before.

We're playing for each other. We're not playing for credit to the media or whoever's thinking we don't deserve a spot. We're playing for each other.

We want to get to the National Championship. We want to win the National Championship for our teammates. So that's really what's propelling us is that right there.

Q. I know you're probably used to being a little bit overlooked as a guy that was a former two-star recruit. I know you're aware of the all ACC snub from last week. How do those kind of slights motivate you? And how much did watching your older brother Sean set an example of what's possible for your career as a football player?

DREW WHITE: You touched on it. I've really always, I felt like, not gotten the credit that I thought I deserved. But at the end of the day, I mean, I'm sitting here getting ready for the Rose Bowl and the College Football Playoff playing with a top defense in the country.

It's not about the awards. It's about the respect that I can get from my teammates and the coaches in the locker room. As long as those guys have faith and trust in me, that's all I really care about. That's all I played for to begin with. For me, it's not really about the awards at all.

And then going after your second question with my brother, he's been a role model for me, to begin with, since the youth football days. And watching him play in the Sugar Bowl against Baker and what he's battled through and how he's handled adversity has been amazing. He's taught me so much, and he's a big part of the success that I've received.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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