

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

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Arlington, Texas, USA

Kyle Hamilton

Notre Dame Fighting Irish

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with safety Kyle Hamilton.

Q. Just quickly, how are you feeling right now? And what is it going to be like going up against a player like DeVonta Smith?

KYLE HAMILTON: Personally, I feel good right now. I think we've got a lot of time since the Clemson game to rest up and get our bodies right for this game coming up on Friday.

I think DeVonta Smith is a really good player, but I mean he showed throughout the year he's one of the best receivers in the country. But I think we have a good game plan to hopefully contain him and show what we are made of on defense as well. I think we have a good group of players on defense that match up well with them.

Q. There's always a lot on your plate being in the position you're in but maybe more here against Alabama considering what you have to deal with stopping the run with Harris and stopping the deep ball with Smith. How do you balance your role and your responsibility against an offense like this?

KYLE HAMILTON: Coach has been preaching just to do your job. All 11 guys need to do their job and stay within ourselves. I think if I do that all the 10 guys do that, we can take care of the run game and passing game at the same time.

I think our plan is very sound. I think as we get deep into the week the players get more comfortable with it, more confident in it. If I do my job, the guys next to me do their job, I think we'll be perfectly fine.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Najee Harris. What makes him unique as a running back? And have you ever tackled somebody that's similar with that size and



elusiveness and speed?

KYLE HAMILTON: I think he's a great player. He's a big back. He's fast. He's agile. He has it all. He has a lot of intangibles. He's a good pass blocker as well.

I think we all just have to bring our feet and just tackle, make open-field tackles. I think that's going to be a big factor in the game, just get him on the ground. Teams have struggled with it and that's when defenses have looked bad against them. But I think if we all we do what we need to do in the run game and hopefully shut that down and do what we need to do in the passing game we'll be okay.

He's a freak. He's a big guy. Shouldn't be moving as fast as he does and laterally as quick as he does. But I think we have people on defense that can stop that and will stop that on Friday.

Q. You've mentioned before just how important it is to be disciplined with your eyes back there in the back end of the defense. Just wondering what the key to that is for you, like if you try to focus on something or multiple things. And just how much more important is that in a game like this when you're going up against so many different weapons?

KYLE HAMILTON: I think you always have to be cognizant of how many people that can hurt you on the field, especially playing against Alabama this week. But I think it all goes back to our coaches talking about doing your job, and me personally not trying to get out of myself, outside of my body and make plays that aren't mine.

I think whether it's a play where I have to keep my eyes on the receiver and not looking in the backfield or keeping my eyes on the quarterback and just play off him, I think that if I stay within myself and do my job, I'll do perfectly fine with my eyes and my progression and stuff like that. I just need to be patient and do my job.

Q. Where did this team get away from the good run defense in the Syracuse game and in the Clemson ACC Championship game, and how do you restore that



going against a team like Alabama?

KYLE HAMILTON: I think it's just we had a couple of games where we weren't filling gaps correctly or were slow to our fits or didn't necessarily fit where we needed to. And I think we've gotten it fixed. It was a problem but that problem has been addressed.

Coach Lea and everybody on the staff has addressed it. And we've gotten it fixed and the game plan is pretty sound right now. And we all know our jobs. And just to emphasize the point of just doing your job. If everybody does their job, then the run game shouldn't be an issue.

I think we all just have to play our game, not try to do too much. I understand it's a big stage, but we've all been here before. We've all played football in big games. I think if we just keep that in mind and keep in mind that we're a great team too, we'll be okay.

Q. I know a lot of third-down success comes from how well you do on first and second down. But I believe against Clemson more than half their third-down conversions were third and six or longer. What do you have to do against Alabama to be one of the best teams on third down, especially on third and long?

KYLE HAMILTON: Coach Lea always preaches throughout the week that first and second down are really important downs, setting up third down, like you said, like third and five, third and manageable, (indiscernible) a wide variety of plays that they can run to get those five yards they need or four yards, whatever it is.

But if we get them in third and seven, third and eight, third-and-long situations, we can go deeper into our third-down playbook and get some pressure going or get some more stuff going in the coverage game.

And then the offense is only limited to a certain amount of plays that they can run, too. The run's kind of out of the option. So I think we can focus more on being just pass defensive players and not focused on too many things at once.

I think that is what maybe got us tripped up with the Clemson game with the quarterback run and stuff like that and third and medium situations. So I think we get them in third and long situations, we'll be much better.

Q. Clark Lea just mentioned that he remembered telling you before the Cotton Bowl in 2018 that you would be on this stage playing there some day. It was cool to see a picture of you on social media of you at the game. What do you remember watching that game

and now what is it like for you, after watching that game just two years ago, now you're playing in the same building in the College Football Playoff?

KYLE HAMILTON: I think it's cool how everything has come full circle. Obviously that game didn't go as we wanted it to. But, I mean, we all have the chance to make up for that now and change the narrative.

I think there's a lot of hype surrounding the game, just talks about Notre Dame not being this or Notre Dame being that. I think within the program we all know who we are and know what we can do. And we all know what kind of game we can play if we're on the same page.

It's cool to get that second chance, and definitely seeing that in person makes it mean more -- I mean, we'll be there on Friday, hopefully perform how we need to.

Q. You were an elite recruit, I think that's fair to say. And I'm going to make an assumption that you lived in a world or sort of occupied a world where you had interactions with other elite recruits through camps and things along those lines. I'm wondering if you can provide a little bit of insight. It does very much seem like the kids who are recruited at that level all sort of end up at the same schools, or there's a very small number of schools that seem to interest recruits at that level. Did you sense that when you were with kids who were being recruited at that level, that everybody seemed to have Georgia, Alabama, Clemson, Ohio State, maybe Notre Dame in there? And I guess the other part of it, do you have any sense of why?

KYLE HAMILTON: Yeah, definitely. I mean, those schools are blue bloods of college football. It's like going to Duke for basketball or Kentucky, or Kansas for basketball. It's a professional factory. If you go there your chances of getting to the NFL are lot higher than if you go to mid-major or other schools.

I think kids lucky enough to be in that position understand that and understand what they can do if they do well in college to hopefully provide for their family and their loved ones.

I think that provides a big boost to those schools because they have a reputation, including us, of just putting guys in the league and making kids' lives better and making their dreams come true, stuff like that.

I think ultimately what separated Notre Dame for me is the academic aspect, because football is going to end at some point. And I want to know that I'll be well educated and well connected throughout the school. I think Notre Dame

provided the best opportunity for me to do that.

So I think that's what separates it from every other school in the country, just the fact that we are a perennial College Football Playoff team along with the fact that we're a top 15 school in the country academically.

I think the blue bloods they're attractive to high recruits and even lower recruits who they deserve to go to schools, but I think that may be the reason why highly recruited kids choose those schools.

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