

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

Friday, January 1, 2021
Arlington, Texas, USA

Ian Book

Kyren Williams

Robert Hainsey

Michael Mayer

Notre Dame Fighting Irish

Alabama - 31, Notre Dame - 14

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with the Notre Dame offensive student-athletes Ian Book, Kyren Williams, Robert Hainsey and Michael Mayer.

Q. Ian, you leave Notre Dame as the all-time winner. What does this program and university mean to you?

IAN BOOK: It means everything to me. Making that decision to come to Notre Dame, it's just been unbelievable. It's been everything to me. It didn't finish the way I wanted to it to.

But I love these guys so much, this whole entire team, the entire program. I didn't know what I was getting myself into going to Notre Dame and it's just exceeded every expectation I've had.

And I'm blessed. It's awesome. What an unbelievable journey. Definitely going to stay positive. And just some special guys. Met lifelong friends and unbelievable coaches. It's just been everything I've wanted it to be. Super fortunate and super grateful. We'll keep our heads high.

Q. Kyren, as one of the guys coming back next year, where do you feel best about this program long hall? Obviously your quarterback, offensive line are a little different next year, but where do you get the most confidence you guys can come back to a stake like this?



KYREN WILLIAMS: I think it's from our past leaders. Rob and Ian, they set a great example, and every other senior set a great example to where we need to be in the future and as players at Notre Dame. So we know what we have to do. We know the work starts tomorrow. So we're ready for what's ahead of us and ready to take it on with new leadership.

Q. Ian, what's changed about the program from your perspective from when you came in, initially, to your five years on campus, all the winning, everything that's gone on? From your perspective what's changed?

IAN BOOK: We talk about traits and a process that we follow. And it really just means living your life the right way on and off the field. And you follow that and you call it a process and there's so many things that go into it. But that's what we call it.

And it's about being the best student-athlete you can be. And it's about graduating and winning a National Championship. We talk about it every single day. When you focus on that, good things happen.

And I remember when I got there, just started with the seniors that took me under their wing and then I try to do the same now that when I'm here. So that just builds on, and I know these guys, when they're seniors, they'll do the same thing.

Q. Ian, those first two drives did it feel like the offense needed to settle down a bit? And how were you guys able to maybe recover from that third drive to get on the board?

IAN BOOK: We just kept saying focus on the next play or one play at a time. No point in looking to the future or no point in looking back at the past. We knew we were going to have some good plays. And we were playing a really good team. We knew they were going to make some plays and we'd have some bad ones. That's part of the game. It's about forgetting about it and moving on.

Q. Ian, we heard you guys and the coaches talk about being able to control the ball, and just by looking at



time of possession, you guys were able to do that. What do you think despite that what went into Alabama being able to still win by multiple touchdowns?

IAN BOOK: That's part of our plan. And they just made more plays than we did tonight. And we talked about that that all week. We were going to try to win the time of possession and then when it's time to make a big play, make a big play. And they made more big plays. That's why they came out victorious tonight.

Q. Michael and Robert, with COVID, you guys really had to come together as a team. What did you learn about leadership and how will this propel the team forward, not only with the leadership aspect but with the physical conditioning playing so late in the season into December and now January?

MICHAEL MAYER: What I learned was that this team has very, very good leaders. Coming in as a freshman there's a lot of things you've got to learn about college football. And seniors in the fifth years here have done a very good job with me and they've taught me a lot. I learned this team has very good leadership. And that's going to keep continuing next year and for as long as I'm here.

ROBERT HAINSEY: I mean, all the seniors, like Ian and Tommy and Liam, Bags, all the guys I've left with, it's been a great couple of years. But the guys to my right and left, Kyren and Mike, sophomore, freshman coming in, those are the guys -- you guys made this season an absolute blast to play.

Kyren, your tenacity and the way you play, it was some of the most fun I've had playing football. And, Mike, seeing you step in as a young guy, I did the same thing. It was a blast, and seeing you excel and do that stuff is what made this season so much fun. So, thank you guys for being there and doing that.

Q. Robert, I hate to pile on right after you showed that bit of emotion, but as Ian's final pass fell incomplete, to my eye, you were the first guy to embrace him. What was said between the two of you at that point?

ROBERT HAINSEY: I told him I love him to death, love him with all my heart. He's been a great teammate and a great quarterback. And I couldn't put it into words how much fun it's been having him as a friend. And he's a true friend and we're going to be friends forever.

And it's been a great four years. I can't wait to see what he does next. The kid's a winner, and all he's going to do is go on and be the best he can be, the best Ian Book he can be. And that's all that he needs to be.

Q. Robert and maybe Kyren or Ian if they want to jump in on it. Obviously there's a lot of offensive linemen leaving. Where do you think the next group can succeed in terms of the offensive line and what it will take for them? And can that still be the identity of this offense starting up front in the trenches with a younger group next year?

ROBERT HAINSEY: Yeah, they have to be. I just told them in the locker room, as one group leaves, another group comes in. We've seen it and we've been through it. We were a younger group in 2018, and we won 12 games and we're back here.

So there's no doubt in my mind that these guys can step up and play the type of football that they learned how to play from Coach Quinn and Coach Rees and from each other. I think that there's no doubt that they'll be able to step up and attack.

And this team's going to go as the offensive line goes. It always has, always will, as with any team. But they need to be the core of the offense like we were, and I think they'll do a great job of that as they step up. And this offseason is going to be huge. And they have a great running back, a great group of tight ends and a great quarterback, great couple of young quarterbacks are going to come in and compete and have fun. So this offense is only going up with the coaching we have and the players we have. I'm excited to watch it.

Q. Kyren and Michael, Coach Kelly talked about just Alabama making more plays and kind of having that firepower. Are there things that you guys can work on in the offseason to where you guys are in the position where you have that firepower on the offense, that you are making those plays instead of watching another team do that against you, I guess?

KYREN WILLIAMS: I just feel like with the offseason work that we're about to put in, we're going to get to that point where we can have that fire point offense or whatever that you seem to think we don't have now. But I feel like this offense has the exact same firepower as the team we just played. Like Ian said, they just made more plays than we did. So I feel like with this work we can only get better and improve.

MICHAEL MAYER: I agree with Kyren. We're just going to come in, keep working. We had a great offense, great firepower this year. It's not going to stop here. We're going to keep it going into next year.

Q. Knowing that it was a great season, can you

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

describe the disappointment of coming up short in this final one?

ROBERT HAINSEY: No.

KYREN WILLIAMS: No. I really can't.

IAN BOOK: It's tough. It's pretty hard to explain. It fell short. Our goal was to win a National Championship and we didn't do that. So some of -- a lot of us -- Rob and I, we're done. It's up to these guys now. But I trust them and I plan on them being back here, and I'll be watching.

Q. Ian, what can you tell us about the younger quarterbacks and what you see happening with that position moving forward? Because obviously not a lot of experience from those guys. You took pretty much every snap this year. But you've seen those guys. What do you think the future at QB can be?

IAN BOOK: I think it's a bright future. I love all those guys. I thought we had an unbelievable room with a bunch of different guys in it. And I just enjoyed this year with all those guys. And I think the competition in the spring is perfect. I think everybody in that QB room wants that. And that's what you need: You want competition and you want guys who want competition.

And it's going to be an unbelievable battle. But all those guys can do it. Every guy in that QB room can do it. I know they have the potential. I'm just excited to watch, and I believe in all of them.

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