

Southeastern Conference Football Media Days

Monday, July 18, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

LSU Tigers

Coach Brian Kelly

Press Conference

GREG SANKEY: Good afternoon. First coach to introduce is the head coach of the LSU Tigers, Brian Kelly, who is a three-time National Coach of the Year, 2019, '12 and '18. Led Notre Dame to the BCS championship game in 2012 and two CFP semifinals.

I had to take dancing lessons yesterday. My younger daughter is getting married. My dancing lessons are not on video. Brian has had his dancing accident on video.

When a five-star quarterback asks you to dance, you dance. When your younger daughter asks you to dance for a wedding, you take dancing lessons in my case.

Off the field Brian and his wife, Paqui, a two-time breast cancer survivor, have a foundation named Kelly Cares, that's donated nearly \$6 million to over 190 causes around the globe.

Please welcome LSU Tigers head coach Brian Kelly.

BRIAN KELLY: Good afternoon. Certainly a pleasure for me to be here at my first, as Greg mentioned, Media Day since 2009. I think for me it kind of signifies college football is back. We can now point our attention towards that.

For me, all of my attention is focused on our LSU football team. It's been quite an interesting six, seven months as I embarked on this journey which has been exciting for me.

It started with the right time at the right place. The timing was right for me. The place was perfect. We had an incredible president, President Tate, an athletic director that I had history with with Scott Woodward, and a rich history and tradition with LSU football.

So for me, it was then taking on that great opportunity in front of me to be part of restoring championship-quality football to LSU.



Also the chance to be part of this incredible conference, the SEC. The challenges that come with that, playing the great schools. I've never been in many of the venues. I'll get an opportunity to play at Auburn this year. I'll get a chance to play at Kyle Field, in the Swamp. Those will be exciting opportunities, something that I've never experienced in my career of 32 years.

The challenges of being in the greatest conference in college football, as well as being at LSU, I've been asked many times why. I can tell you that certainly that shared vision of our administration, the great opportunity to restore championship-level football to LSU, and then the SEC itself, being part of this great conference.

For me, it's been, as I mentioned, an opportunity to put a roster together in a very short period of time creatively. We've had to use the transfer portal. We've recruited. We've spent a lot of time in player development. We will then give everybody an opportunity to say, What do we look like here on a Sunday night against Florida State? We're excited about that opportunity.

So with that, I'll open it up to questions.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. When you took over Notre Dame in 2010, you had a new quarterback, a new offensive line. Notre Dame had some struggles out of the gate in September. Is there anything we can learn from that experience to be LSU undefeated with Mississippi State and Florida State right out of the gate?

BRIAN KELLY: Now that you put it that way, I hope not (smiling).

Certainly we have four quarterbacks. The spring really was for us to lay down our offense. We weren't really going to gear it towards any particular skill set.

I feel much better about the depth in the quarterback situation. Dane was really the only quarterback that had any experience. We're young and inexperienced at that position. I think the depth at the quarterback position is



much different. Jayden and certainly Myles bring us obviously starting experience. Garrett obviously for me is an exciting quarterback. Walker is a true freshman, but there's great depth there.

The offensive line is clearly an area that we need to keep our eye on. But I think we've added some really good transfers, and we think we've got some young men that have developed.

I would say that right now I stand in front of you that those similar situations, I like the depth and the opportunity to be much better than 2010.

Q. It's been documented that the collective of LSU doesn't have as much funds as other schools. How do you overcome that? Have you run into a situation yet where maybe you were out-bid for a player?

BRIAN KELLY: First of all, I don't know that we don't have as many funds. Nobody has given me any kind of documentation that we're behind.

I feel very comfortable, quite honestly, as I stand here talking to you that what we're doing relative to NIL is as competitive as anybody else.

I don't feel like we're being out-bid by anybody. I don't think that's the place of NIL anyway. So if we were being out-bid, then we're going to be out-bid if we have \$50 million in our collective.

I don't feel hamstrung by that. I want to continue to educate with NIL. I want to be able to use the resources wisely to help promote name, image and likeness and have that available for our student-athletes when the time comes.

Q. So much of coaching is teaching, earning the trust of your players. How has it been with Myles Brennan, Kayshon Boutte, John Emery, those guys that maybe they're going to be the key parts of your offense? How have you earned their trust so far?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, I think trust is a two-way street. They're earning my trust, too. I think it works both ways.

First of all, trust is about saying something and backing it up, and then continuing that relationship. We're working on that relationship every day through deeds, through things that we put in front of them and say that we're going to do for them, and backing it up, then asking them to do some things for us, seeing that they back it up.

I think in all three of those cases, we're building trust. As

you know, Kayshon was just awarded No. 7 which we consider a program number that highlights the very best player, in particular from the state of Louisiana. That has to happen when trust has been formed.

Myles has been one of our best leaders in our program. John Emery has done an incredible job of bringing himself back into our program.

I think you brought up three guys that have earned a lot of trust and we're trusting them.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your secondary, what you feel about the talent level there, the two transfers from Arkansas, Foucha and Brooks, how they might fit in.

BRIAN KELLY: Let me address Foucha and Brooks.

They have been outstanding additions to our program. I know many don't like to see that happen within the league. I'm not crazy about it either. But these are two Louisiana kids that wanted to play at LSU, and they have been great additions. Character. I would say that when we were looking into the transfer portal, we wanted young men that had SEC experience and had ties to the state of Louisiana. Brooks and Foucha fit that to the T.

I think the secondary has a number of players that we've I think went out and recruited either through the portal or that were in the program that give us great depth. But they're going to have to go out and prove it. I think that's an area that is going to have to come together for us, but we think we have depth and we think we have some talent there.

Q. I wonder why you feel like you're a great fit for LSU since you haven't been in the south that much. What do you think of Texas and Oklahoma joining an already great conference?

BRIAN KELLY: Well, I think fit is about the ability to run a program at the highest level. I've done it for 32 years. I've had success at Notre Dame, Cincinnati, Central Michigan, wherever I've been. So running a program and then player development, I think those are the most important things.

I don't think that needs to be geographical in a sense. I've gotten to love where I'm at in Baton Rouge. I love the people. They love football. They love family. They love food. That fits me really well. I guess I should have been in the South all along.

I love the fact that Oklahoma and Texas, two great programs, are coming into the SEC. That speaks to

Commissioner Sankey and understanding the lay of the land, being proactive and having two great institutions coming into the SEC. We'll be excited when they officially join to have them on the schedule as well.

Q. Haven't been at Notre Dame for quite a while, would you be surprised if they joined a conference or do you think they'll stay independent? What do you think of their philosophies toward that?

BRIAN KELLY: It's probably not been high on my list of things to think about. I've been trying to correct a slice for the last couple of weeks, and I haven't had much success with that. So I'm going to go back to my day job (smiling).

But I would say certainly Notre Dame still is a coveted university in terms of what conference would want them. Jack Swarbrick knows what he's doing. He's got his ear to the ground. They're going to land into a good position no matter what they do, whether they stay independent or whether they go into one of the other conferences.

Notre Dame can carry itself pretty good.

Q. BJ Ojulari is one of our kids.

BRIAN KELLY: Yes, he is.

Q. Was hoping to get your thoughts on your initial impressions of him and what you expect out of him this year.

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, well, first of all, I've gotten to know him much more as a person than a player. Saw him a little bit in spring. He's a good player, by the way.

But as a person, he's what you want to represent your program. That's why he's represented us as our student-athlete representative in the NCAA forums. He represented us in our student-athlete interactions on campus. He represents us here today because his traits are outstanding. His character, how he handles himself in the classroom, he's a leader.

I couldn't say more about the integrity and character that he has. Look, we're going to talk about his ability to rush the passer and his prominence there. But I could talk more about the person than the player today because that's who I've been associating myself with more on a day-to-day basis.

Q. Notre Dame played Florida State three of the last four seasons, I believe. Where have you seen growth in that program from the team from '18 you faced then the last two under Mike Norvell?

BRIAN KELLY: I think probably more than anything else, the fight in that team. I thought they fought for four quarters against Notre Dame last year. That was a team that obviously played to overtime. They were down late, came back. That has a lot to do with buy-in. You could see them playing harder and harder. Maybe that wasn't as visible earlier on.

This is a team now that has Mike's stamp on it. It's going to play hard for four quarters. You can see the development of younger players coming along, special on the offensive line. Defensively there's a structure there that is sound and fundamental.

So I really just think you're just seeing the signs of a football program inside-out making the incremental progress that everybody wants to see more wins, but as a football coach my eyes see a program that's been getting better and better.

Q. What are your thoughts on facing Florida State in the opener? How much of your notes at Notre Dame kind of carry over given you're in a new position?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, a lot of them carry over. They lost some really good players, defensively obviously one of the better defensive players in the country. But certainly we're relying on a lot of that film, and certainly player evaluations. I know a lot about what they want to do offensively, though they lost their offensive coordinator. There's a lot of familiar notes that we can go back to.

We've got a new team. We've got new players. It's an opener. You throw a lot of that stuff out because you know everybody's going to be playing at their highest level in their opener.

Q. Most important question of the day: In your best Southern accent, what is the best or favorite food you've had since you moved to Louisiana?

BRIAN KELLY: Understand now, I have a Boston, Midwestern, Louisiana accent now. It's three dialects into one. It's no longer family, I got all kinds of stuff to throw at you. Just be ready (smiling).

The best? You know, it's probably the crawfish etouffee. I don't know how you top that. I would say also the grilled oysters. If you haven't had grilled oysters, try that. That will get your cholesterol level up high pretty quickly. That's pretty good, too.

Q. The SEC has really turned into the club that everyone is trying to get into, it seems. From your

perspective, as someone on the inside, seeing teams trying to get on the inside, can you describe what that's like?

BRIAN KELLY: Musical chairs, then the music is going to stop here and you're not going to have a place at the table. I think that's scary for a lot of universities. It's left a lot of internal conversations about where do we go. I understand that. There's the question about Notre Dame, what do they do. Maybe they're better positioned than some.

It's musical chairs and there's not enough chairs for everybody. That's the current state of college football.

Q. Looking at the schedule down the stretch, a lot of tough road games in the SEC, at Auburn, at Florida, Arkansas. What is your mindset going into those road games in the SEC this season and in future seasons coming from Notre Dame?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think it's a great question.

I think it's how you train your team. Look, you have to be ready for a battle through December, right? Conference championship is in December. If you're training your team just to get to the first week, you're never going to make it to December.

I think you have to have the end in mind first. The end in mind first is December, and planning for those kinds of games in October and in November.

I think you have to be very intentional about how you train your team, how you practice. All of those things matter because you're going to be playing big games in October and November.

Look, you want them to be big games, too. Let's be clear, right? What you do in September matters because October is important or you don't matter in November.

Answering the question in the fashion of training your team the right way and getting them there is absolutely crucial.

Q. How do you assess the physical readiness of this team to do what you're planning to implement this season? Are they physically ready from a strength and conditioning standpoint? As far as your quarterback situation, what are you looking at there, Myles Brennan looks ready to go? You have Jayden Daniels. How is the quarterback situation looking this spring?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I think our numbers look pretty good. Our GPS numbers show a fitness that will have us

prepared for Florida State. We trained outside all summer. We have two more days this week, then we're off. We finish up our summer program with two more days of training this week, today counting.

Yeah, we're healthy. I think our kids would tell you they feel as good as they've ever felt. Our numbers look really good across the board.

Then as it relates to the quarterbacks, it's similar to what I have said to a number of people that asked about the quarterback situation. We're really going to have to set the offensive structure and its installation to the skill set of the particular players.

Number one, they got to take care of the football. Number two, they have to get the ball to play-makers. I have play-makers on offense that are already in place. They've got to get the ball to the play-makers. Number three, they've got to make plays, that quarterback.

The ultimate decision-making on who that quarterback is, he'll have to hit those three notes. I think all of these guys can do that. We'll have to put them in that position so we can evaluate that.

Q. I spoke with former alum Ryan Clark. He's very adamant about the talent on the state of Louisiana with your national recruiting. How do you balance locking down the state of Louisiana with the great players and balancing with other states that you've recruited out of Notre Dame?

BRIAN KELLY: Yeah, I mean, I think first and foremost, making sure that you evaluate the entire state of Louisiana. I think that means make sure you extend yourself. It's not just New Orleans and the greater Baton Rouge area. You have to get up north, all the way up through Shreveport, up to Monroe, all into the state of Louisiana.

Now, that doesn't mean you just take a kid from Louisiana because he's from Louisiana. If he's not rated as high, can you go out of state? Sure. But you better know the players in the state of Louisiana. That means the entire state.

I think that's maybe where if I've gotten any feedback that maybe we needed to extend our recruiting efforts a little bit further north. I think we've done that.

Q. How much did the lopsided losses to Alabama play into the fact that you wanted to leave Notre Dame for LSU?

BRIAN KELLY: That wasn't part of my decision-making.

Those were really good teams. They both won the national championship. I thought we played Alabama better than anybody in that last Playoff. Their talent was unbelievable on the offensive side of the ball that year. So that wasn't like, I'm taking the LSU job, Alabama is so much better than us. That was not part of the process for me.

It was timing. It was this place at LSU. It was the administration and the opportunity to bring this program back. It really had nothing to do with the Alabama game.

Q. I think I read this right, that Brad Davis is the only assistant you retained.

BRIAN KELLY: That's correct.

Q. I wonder why you did that, what went into that thought process. What kind of coach do you think Brad is, what he'll do with the O-line?

BRIAN KELLY: Brad was the interim head coach. I got a chance to see him in a different capacity, much more of a, I would say, leadership capacity where he got an opportunity to really touch all of the players.

I really loved his ability to reach players. I felt like if he could reach all of those players, how well would he do with 15 to 18 players.

Also, he worked for Sam. I consider Sam Pittman one of the best, if not the best, offensive line coach in college football. So he's been tutored under the best, played the position, from Baton Rouge. All those things together.

My time with him, his want and desire to be part of LSU made it an easy decision for me.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Kelly, thank you for your time this afternoon.

BRIAN KELLY: Thank you. Appreciate it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports