‘The right man at the right time for Notre Dame’

Brian Kelly named 29th Irish head football coach
Brian Kelly, ‘the right man’ for ND

By MICHAEL BRYAN
Associate Sports Editor

After weeks of rumors and speculation, Brian Kelly was officially introduced as Notre Dame’s 29th head coach Friday.

Kelly has signed a five-year deal to coach the Irish after leading Cincinnati to consecutive BCS appearances. The 47-year-old Kelly went 34-6 in three years with the Bearcats, and was named Big East Coach of the Year all three seasons.

Kelly also won the national Home Depot Coach of the Year award Thursday night.

“Nobody does it like Notre Dame,” Kelly said. “There’s a chapel in every dorm, and there’s a leader around every corner, and we will cultivate that leadership here at Notre Dame, and we will continue to move towards excellence both in the classroom and on the football field.”

A veteran with 19 years of head coaching experience, Kelly will not coach Cincinnati’s Sugar Bowl game against Florida. He informed the Bearcats team of his decision Thursday afternoon before his press conference.

“I’m forever grateful to the players and their families, to the Bearcats administration, to the athletic department and to all the Bearcats fans,” Kelly said.

“By Michael Bryan

“The story is like this. You come home as a parent and you’re going to tell your kids that they’re moving and they love the friends and they love the community, and as we started to tell them, tears began to well up in their eyes, and Gracie came up to me, grabbed me, hugged me and said, ‘Dad, I’m so happy for you. I know this has been your dream. And I’m sad for me just for a little bit. Is that okay?’ And I kissed her, and I said, ‘You know what, that’s what is so magical about this is that my kids know that this was a dream for me.’”

“We followed our criteria, we stuck to it, and at every step along the way, it kept taking me back to the same conclusion that Brian Kelly was the right person to lead this program,” Swarbrick said. “He was the first person I talked to. He was the only person I offered this opportunity to. And it was a compelling case throughout.”

The news of Kelly’s hiring broke Thursday afternoon and was officially announced through a university release that night.

“Growing up as an Irish Catholic in Boston, Massachusetts, I’d come home from church after driving my parents crazy and listen to the reruns or the replays of Notre Dame football, and indelibly etched in my mind, in my vision was the great Lindsey Nelson talking about as we move further into the third quarter, the action, and Notre Dame playing that day,” Kelly said.

“That was all that was on my mind through the course house.”

Kelly said the Notre Dame job has been a dream of his for years.

“We’re careful about that,” Swarbrick said. “You do not come to the University of Notre Dame because you want to be average. You want to be the best of the best. And that’s why I’m here. It inspires me to be around young men like I had in front of me today.”

Swarbrick said that throughout the process he sought the advice of several members of the team, who helped the director of athletics with the search.

“I read a lot of things about people saying that this was a less attractive job than it used to be, or the interest was not what it used to be. You weren’t in my shoes,” Swarbrick said. “The interest in being the leader of this program was extraordinary, and I was so buoyed by the level of that interest and the way many of the best coaches in the country were really interested in being part of our program.”

One trait that stood out to Swarbrick was Kelly’s appreciation for the traditions of Notre Dame, and he honored the new coach with a unique gift.

“There’s a tradition that we didn’t discuss that you may or may not be familiar with. The last element of that mass frequently as celebrated by Fr. Doyle, who’s with us today, is to identify a saint that we’re honoring that day, and every player as they leave the mass and head across the walk or get on the bus for an away game, gets a medal to take with them. Many of our players figure out a way to affix that to their uniforms or other wise have it with them. And yes, we do keep of the saints’ won loss records. We’re careful about that,” Swarbrick said.

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Kelly has ‘plan in place’ for coaching staff

By BILL BRINK
Sports Writer

Charlie Weis is gone, Brian Kelly is here, but there are two groups of coaches on the Notre Dame football team whose job situation remains uncertain:

Some Irish assistants led their players to dramatic improvement, but other position groups took steps back.

Kerry Rudolph, who is from Cincinnati, where Kelly coached prior to coming to Notre Dame, said he's talked to friends of his on the Bearcats and even a manager of the team throughout the process. He's heard nothing but positive responses and saw it himself Friday morning.

"The way he carried himself, very passionate, he has a love for the game," Rudolph said.

Rudolph said the Cincinnati basketball team used to be the main attraction in town, but Kelly had turned the football program into a front-runner. "I hope Kelly can do the same for Notre Dame." When we were being recruited it was back-to-back Big Ten as well," Rudolph said.

Sophomore quarterback Dayne Crist spoke to the media Friday after Brian Kelly was introduced as Notre Dame's new head football coach. Crist is expected to be the team's starting quarterback next season.

Sophomore Lincoln Alford, in his first year as the head coach, has made a number of changes to the defensive staff. Bob Diaco took over as the Bearcats' defensive coordinator before this season. Previously he served as defensive coordinator at Virginia and as linebacker and special teams coach before that.

Kerry Coombs, Kelly's associate head coach and defensive backs coach at Cincinnati, may make the trip with him. Coombs graduated from the high school ranks and has coached with Kelly for the past three seasons.

Coombs would replace Corwin Brown, the associate head coach and defensive backs coach at Notre Dame. Kelly’s defensive backs underperformed this season based on previous performance and perceived level of talent.

Cincinnati's linebackers coach, William Inge, has coached at Cincinnati for two years but in 2008 three of the team’s top four tacklers were linebackers—not the case at Notre Dame. Notre Dame’s linebackers coach Jon Tenuta has enjoyed great success elsewhere, but his blitz-happy style of defense hasn’t produced results during his tenure at Notre Dame.

Defensive line coach Mike Elston spent his first year coaching the linemen after two years as the tight ends coach. Elston would replace Notre Dame defensive line coach Randy Hart, who has 39 years of college coaching experience. 21 of them at Washington.

Notre Dame recorded 20 sacks and 73 tackles for loss this season.

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By BILL BRINK
Sports Writer

One word emanated from the players and resonated throughout the Guglielmino Athletics Complex Friday afternoon: "Energetic."

The word stemmed from new coach Brian Kelly's meeting with the players that morning and came to light when Kelly started speaking.

"Coach Kelly is a lot more energetic and outgoing," Kapron Lewis-Moore said when asked about the comparison between Kelly and former coach Charlie Weis.

"He went out there Monday morning to introduce himself and allow the team to get to know him," Lewis-Moore said.

"Basically, it was getting to know him and how he does things," Lewis-Moore said.

Sophomore tight end Kyle Rudolph, who is from Cincinnati, where Kelly coached prior to coming to Notre Dame, said he's talked to friends of his on the Bearcats and even a manager of the team throughout the process. He's heard nothing but positive responses and saw it himself Friday morning.

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“He has won at every level with every kind of team. He is a winner.”

Jack Swarbrick
director of athletics

“You do not come to the University of Notre Dame because you want to be average. You want to be the best of the best.”

Brian Kelly
Irish coach
“I want tough gentlemen.”

Brian Kelly
Irish coach

“We can’t trade anybody. There’s no waiver wire. We’re going to develop our players, and they’re going to play their very best for us.”

Brian Kelly
Irish coach

Photos by
IAN GAVLICK
COMMENTARY

Holtz’s ’93 squad a model for success

Notre Dame message boards have been a free-for-all for the past month, and perhaps none more than ND Nation — the final destination for disgruntled and often belligerent Irish fans to vent their opinions, especially during times of coaching transition.

And with Friday’s official announcement that Brian Kelly would man the Notre Dame sidelines next year, the boards went haywire.

In sifting through the rubble of questions and comments on the Kelly hire, I stumbled across one nostalgic post that linked to an archived Sports Illustrated cover story that ran after the No. 2 Irish toppled top-ranked Florida State in a colossal clash of unbeaten teams.

In that epic showdown, it was the Seminoles’ offense that mysteriously abandoned a successful running game and inexplicably disappeared for two quarters after utterly dominating on their opening drive. It was the Seminoles’ defense that lamented countless missed tackles and couldn’t muster an answer for a downhill ground attack.

This is Notre Dame, and there’s no denying that Kelly’s new squad presents an unmatched set of challenges and a glaring national spotlight that only his predecessors can fully comprehend.

It’s clear that Holtz and company faced the same issues during their time on the sidelines, but Kelly faces a more daunting task. He’s not only tasked with bringing success to South Bend, but also with restoring Notre Dame’s winning tradition.

Holtz’s ’93 squad was a model for success, and Kelly has the opportunity to build upon that foundation.

By Matt Gamber
Sports Editor

STUDENT REACTION

Students perform their own variations of the salute to the coach during the ’1212 Overtune’ in between the third and fourth quarter of Notre Dame’s 33-30 overtime loss to Connecticut.

I just hope Kelly can turn the program around before I graduate. I’d like to see at least one winning regular season.

Mike Delach
junior

I only hope that this passion will translate into landing recruits and winning games over the next few years.

Scott McIntosh
junior

Students hope Kelly can turn the program around before I graduate, but I think he will be able to lead the team to a great season next year.

For the Class of 2011, next year represents their last opportunity to see a winning regular season while at Notre Dame. Junior Mike Delach said he would like to see Kelly have a successful first year to help heal some of the worst scars of the Weis era, including avenging losses to Navy.

“I just hope Kelly can turn the program around before I graduate,” Delach said. “I’d like to see at least one winning regular season.”

Contact Joe McMahon at jmcmaho6@nd.edu

Students perform their own variations of the salute to the coach during the ‘1212 Overtune’ in between the third and fourth quarter of Notre Dame’s 33-30 overtime loss to Connecticut.
Brian Kelly comes to Notre Dame with more collegiate accolades and achievements than any other Notre Dame coach in recent history—at least in the last decade.

From Grand Valley State to Central Michigan to Cincinnati, Kelly has blazed a trail of football success all the way to South Bend.

After four years playing linebacker, Kelly graduated from Assumption College in 1983. Four years later, he joined the coaching staff at Grand Valley State as a graduate assistant and defensive backs coach. He was promoted to defensive coordinator in 1989, and then to head coach in 1991.

Kelly led the Lakers to winning seasons in each of his 13 years at Grand Valley State, compiling a 118-35-2 overall record. In his final three seasons in Grand Rapids, the Lakers went 41-2, at one point winning 20 games in a row. Kelly's 2001 team set a Division II record by averaging 58.4 points per game.

In 2002 and 2003, Kelly led Grand Valley State to back-to-back Division II national championships, and was named AFCA Division II Coach of the Year in both seasons.

Kelly was hired by Central Michigan in 2004, and immediately turned around a program that had won more than three games only once in the previous four seasons.

After a 4-7 record in his first year, Kelly led the Chippewas to a 6-5 mark in 2005. Central Michigan's first winning season in seven years. The next year, Central Michigan went 9-4, won the MAC and qualified for the Motor City Bowl. Before Kelly could coach the team in the bowl game, though, he accepted an offer from Cincinnati to take its head coaching position.

In his first full season with the Bearcats, Kelly led the team to their first 10-win season since 1949, and was named Big East Coach of the Year.

"[Mark] Dantonio left, and everyone was kind of like, 'What's going to happen now?' Are they going to go back to just mediocrity?" Garrett Sabelhaus, Sports Editor of the Cincinnati News-Record student newspaper, said earlier this week. "Then Brian Kelly came along, picked up right where Dantonio left off and just took it to heights nobody had ever imagined could happen at UC."

Sabelhaus said a big part of the transition was getting the team used to Kelly's potent spread offensive scheme.

"He just installed his system over the offseason, and then the next year they started to be that machine on offense that you see now as pretty polished," Sabelhaus said.

In 2008, Kelly led the Bearcats to their first ever Big East title and BCS berth. This year, Cincinnati is currently undefeated and will play Florida in the Sugar Bowl.

Sabelhaus said that Kelly's decision to not coach the Bearcats in arguably the biggest game in their history could irk some in the Queen City.

"I think what people might be a little concerned with, and maybe turn on B.K. a little bit, is if he leaves before the bowl game," Sabelhaus said.

While Kelly brings a potent offensive attack to Notre Dame, Sabelhaus also said that the defense was likely to improve under the new regime.

"The thing is, Cincinnati's defense is a motivated group of guys," Sabelhaus said. "You've got to think that if Brian Kelly gets the kind of recruits that Notre Dame gets, he's going to do something with them, whether it's on offense or defense."

Sabelhaus added that Kelly was savvy enough with the media to handle the intense spotlight in South Bend.

"The way he handles the media is almost a genius way," Sabelhaus said. "He gets everybody on his side." Kelly will get to face the media scrutiny right away, as a talented roster has many Irish fans hoping for a BCS berth in 2010.

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"He gets everybody on his side." Kelly will get to face the media scrutiny right away, as a talented roster has many Irish fans hoping for a BCS berth in 2010.
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