



## Notre Dame Arrival Quotes

Monday, December 24, 2018  
AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas



**MODERATOR:** Good morning, everyone. And welcome to the College Football Playoff Semifinal at the Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic. This is the Notre Dame arrival press conference. And, at this time, we will introduce our players -- our head coach, Coach Kelly, and Sam Mustipher and Drue Tranquill.

And we'll begin with Coach Kelly. We call this the arrival press conference; however, you and your team actually arrived throughout the day yesterday and into last night. Did everyone make it in here okay?

**COACH KELLY:** Yeah, we made it in just fine throughout the day. Certainly, we are excited to be here. We want to thank, certainly, the Cotton Bowl chairman, Carl Ice, was there last night. Got a chance to fire up the troops, talk to the team.

He awarded me with a -- I don't know if it's customary, but a 10-gallon hat, which I readily accepted as I went over and got my cowboy boots. So I feel as a Texan today. We're excited.

Rick Baker has been with us, the president and CEO. I want to thank him.

But I know our guys feel very comfortable.

We're in a great hotel. So just first-class accommodations. And, again, we're excited about getting into a routine now. Now that we've gotten settled in, you know, it's really for us now to get into a game week mode and kind of flip it into our preparation.

**MODERATOR:** Coach, please introduce your two student-athletes. Most everyone here knows them, but there may be a few folks who do not.

**COACH KELLY:** Well, first and foremost, they are two graduates of Notre Dame. Both of them have degrees in engineering. Both of them are captains: Drue Tranquill, linebacker; and Sam Mustipher, offensive center. So very proud of both of them as graduates of Notre Dame, in a very challenging academic degree as engineering, and both captains for us. So great football players, but extraordinary individuals.

*Q. Just curious what you've seen on film about the challenge that the Clemson defensive line presents, and also could you talk about how your offensive line came together this year after losing some key personnel from last year.*

**OL SAM MUSTIPHER:** Clemson has a big athletic front. They've shown that on film, the ability to move, get off blocks and make a lot of plays. It's going to be a

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challenge for us, and we understand that. And it's just going back to the fundamentals and basics.

***Q. Tell us how you guys came together this year after losing so much talent from last year.***

**OL SAM MUSTIPHER:** We have a standard of Notre Dame offensive line play. It's been here long before I got here, long before those guys who moved on last year got here. And we take pride in what we do. And we understand guys on Saturdays who've played here before are watching us. And we go out there every weekend and give it the best we have.

***Q. Talk about the defense. You guys were top 10 with defense and pass-efficiency defense. What was been the key to the success of the defensive unit this year?***

**LB DRUE TRANQUILL:** I think it starts up front with our defensive line and their ability to get pressure on the quarterback. And then just playing sound in the back ends.

But I've got to give the kudos to the D-line. We're deep there, and they've been able to get pressure on the quarterback all year. And they can make average linebackers look great. But, you know, we're good all across the board, and they've done a great job getting pressure up front. And then we've held up in the back end a lot of good talent and execution.

***Q. Drue, you get the hype all month kind of for this game. How different is it when you finally get to Dallas, Texas, and how have you kind of seen the young guys respond from all this?***

**LB DRUE TRANQUILL:** Yeah, I didn't get here until last night at about 9:30 on the team charter. So we are fairly fresh here in Dallas, but it's been great. Guys are locked in and ready to practice this morning. And, you know, we'll get to enjoy ourselves this evening at the comedy show and get to spend some time with our families. But we're kind of all business right now and got to go have a good practice and get after it.

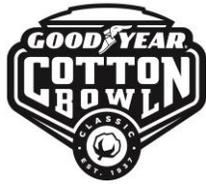
***Q. Drue, you're coming here a day after Jaylon Smith had a pretty big day in this stadium yesterday. What do you think that means for Notre Dame linebackers, and how do you want to continue the legacy this weekend?***

**LB DRUE TRANQUILL:** Yeah, Jaylon is a good friend of mine. We're both from Fort Wayne, Indiana, and I grew up training with him. And so to see him have a big game yesterday was awesome. And just to see him come back from -- you know, what he did was truly inspiring. And so we've got to get out there and run around like he does and make plays all over the field for our team. And certainly hope to see him this week and get to

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catch up with him. Great guy and great player.

*Q. For both Drue and Sam, was there a game, a moment, anytime where you started thinking that this would be a real special year for Notre Dame during the course of the season or even before the start of the season?*

**OL SAM MUSTIPHER:** I think what makes this team special is that we just took it one day and one practice at a time and we took it one game at a time. So we really didn't look too far ahead. And we understand that, if we go out there and we do what we need to do on Saturdays, that it was going to be an opportunity for us that was going to be there.

**LB DRUE TRANQUILL:** For me, I made the decision to come back last December. And I knew we had the pieces. It was just a matter of execution at that point. And so, you know, when we got into fall camp and I saw the way our defense was executing, you know, 11 as one we weren't really playing as individuals; we were playing cohesively together. I knew we had a special thing going there defensively. And then watching our defense just get after it against Michigan. And then just transitioning quarterbacks like it was nothing. The special unit over there.

So, defensively, in fall camp, I was like "We got this thing." And then, offensively, they've just continued to prove themselves and be great each and every week.

**MODERATOR:** All right. At this point, we'll let Sam and Drue get ready for practice, and we'll continue with Coach Kelly.

**COACH KELLY:** I think that I'm the one who should go to practice. These guys are awesome. I want to sit here and listen to them.

*Q. Brian, it's kind of interesting that both these teams are undefeated and both made quarterback changes during the course of the season. Talk about what went into your move to Ian [Book] and all the factors. You're obviously unbeaten at the time, but what factored into it and what kind of development have you seen from him since he took over that job?*

**COACH KELLY:** I've spoken on this a number of times. We felt like the offense was coming to us, but there was a lot of work that needed to be done for it to come to us in terms of we had to play a complete game both offensively, defensively, and special teams.

And, you know, even though we had won our first three games, I think -- and one of the games, we played defensively over 90 snaps. So there was a lot of work

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going into it. So as we evaluated moving forward, we felt like Ian [Book] would give us the best shot at winning each and every week that we played and doing it with more efficiency.

So it was a matter of looking at it from much more of an overall perspective of how it would affect our entire team, not just offense. Because Brendan [Clark], you know, won a lot of games as a starter. So it wasn't about just winning games on offense, but it was for the entire football team.

And then I think where Ian has grown is just game situations, settling into the game, making game adjustments, getting a feel for the game, all the things that you would expect somebody that was a first-year starter that he needed. And so he's gained that game-like experience where you can make some adjustments. And he picks up on it and is able to execute. I think that's where we've seen the growth.

*Q. Coach, I know sometimes for these bowl games, some people don't show up because of academic reasons or injuries and such. Do you think everyone will be available for this weekend's game?*

**COACH KELLY:** Yeah, this is not a bowl game. This is a bowl -- it's sponsored by the Cotton Bowl, but this is a playoff game. So all the players that are here are eligible to play, and so we took everybody. So we don't have anybody that's not eligible to play.

We do have one injury update. Dillan Gibbons had a fracture in his foot during practice, and he had surgery. So he will not play. He wasn't going to play anyway. He was being redshirted.

But, yeah, we have no issues relative to academics. We don't have anybody that is not playing because of their NFL aspirations or any injuries that may have occurred during the last couple of practices.

*Q. How would you say Myron [Tagovailoa-Amosa] has, I guess, progressed over the last few weeks?*

**COACH KELLY:** Been very impressed. I think he's capable of playing and playing well. Now, sometimes you get a player back and maybe he can give you a few snaps here. I think he can play, and I think he can play well for us.

*Q. Can you talk a little bit about Drue's [Tranquill] journey throughout his time from safety to linebacker and what you've seen from him this year and how he's grown while you've been coach.*

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**COACH KELLY:** Yeah, so he's actually made two position changes. He started at safety, tore his ACL, had to fight through that. Then we moved him to rover. He tore his other ACL, fought through that, and we moved him to linebacker. So his journey has been amazing in terms of injuries, overcoming injuries, just an amazing -- just off the field, on the field, what he's been able to do.

He's now married. He's got a child on the way. He's just -- he's everything that you want in this business relative to coaching. You know? Just a mentor to our players, a great leader, somebody that overcame adversity through his career here and a great representative of our university as a great student.

So you know, that's the mold -- right? -- that you'd want, you know, to get a guy like Drue Tranquill. And sometimes it's almost where he had to really grow is that he wasn't believable in a sense almost. You know, here's a 4.0, clearly, you know, student-- maybe not quite a 4.0, but that kind of student. And guys couldn't identify with him because he was this guy that they just couldn't live up to.

But this year he just became so much more of a mentor to our other players that, you know, somebody asked the question, when did you know that you were going to have a special team? I knew we were going to have a special team when Drue Tranquill was able to reach everybody in our locker room, because when you have a guy like that that can reach every player, he's going to impact them all.

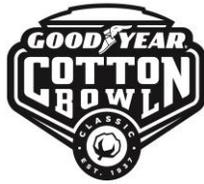
*Q. When did that transition occur? Is there a certain moment that you think showed him not being able to necessarily relate, because you said he has such an unbelievable story, to really connecting with his teammates?*

**COACH KELLY:** Yeah, I think when we did some leadership training and we talked about traits of -- you know, one of the traits that he had, self-discovery, was that he had a hard time relating to some people based upon what his strengths were. You know, he's very spiritual. He's driven. And sometimes that didn't exactly connect with people. And so, when he saw that those were some of his traits, he went to work on those. And so, through January, February, and our off-season, he went to work on those things. And you could see how that was kind of taking shape.

*Q. Brian, kind of the same question that I asked Sam [Mustipher], in terms of what you've seen from that Clemson defensive line on film and also how your offensive line has come together after losing two All-Americans from last year.*

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**COACH KELLY:** Yeah, I mean they are who they are. There's no denying that this is one of the top, if not the best, defensive lines that I can remember facing. I mean, maybe Alabama in '12. There's some similarities to the '17 North Carolina State front. but this is as good as it gets.

Versatility, explosiveness, edge presence, we have to be -- the ball has got to come out quickly. You can't stand back there and hold it. You've got to move the launch point. You have to find a way to keep them off-balance in the run game. But you're not going to run it down their throat. You're not going to bludgeon them up front. But you have to keep them off-balance. So it will be a challenge.

But I think what's happened this year with this offensive line is that they work well together. They now know each other, they know how to work with each other, and they play off each other pretty good.

*Q. Coach, what's your relationship with Coach [Dabo] Swinney, and how far do you guys go back? Do you go back to 2015 and that first game, or is it even further?*

**COACH KELLY:** Before '15, we had met a couple times prior to that. But we spent some time in the off-season, '15, at different events. And we play in the Peach Bowl Classic golf tournament together, so we've been able to spend some more time outside of football.

I think we just enjoy our company in the sense that we can talk about other things than football. We talk about our foundations and what we do in our foundations, and can keep it lighthearted from that perspective. So it doesn't have to be all about football. I think we kind of like it that way.

*Q. I don't know how aware you were during the final weeks of the CFP debate. You were clearly in the playoffs, but there were people going "you don't have to play a championship game." Some of the teams on your schedule were enjoying down years, that sort of thing. How -- you know, you don't normally associate Notre Dame and respect in the same thing, but is there a little bit of a respect factor at all for you and your team coming into this game?*

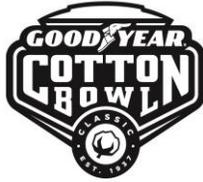
**COACH KELLY:** Nah, I really don't think so. I think that there was a little bit of -- I think every team other than maybe Alabama and, quite frankly, Clemson, who has been here four times, everybody's going to get picked at a little bit. But, you know, we think our schedule has always been set up to play the very best. And, you know, we won every game we played.

So, you know, I think it's natural that there's always going to be a little bit of chatter, but I don't think we ever felt that there was disrespect. We've got to go out

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and win, you know, in these big games, certainly, you know, because we're still being compared to what happened in 2012, fair or unfair. We need to set a new kind of parameter there.

But, no, I don't think our guys -- they've heard enough of it. They're ready to play, but I don't think we've lost any sleep.

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