

## **How Notre Dame Football Can Make You a Winner! 1 in a 2 part series**

There is something special going on in South Bend.

At Notre Dame, the expectations for the football program are high. They have a national following, a national TV contract, and strong contingent of alumni and fans who have longed to see the shine on the Golden Dome restored. Their fans are often unforgiving. They proudly lay claim to 11 National Championships but after a 24 year drought, their patience for a program in a rebuilding mode has worn thin. There is enormous pressure to win at Notre Dame. A mere winning record is not acceptable. Anything less than national prominence is considered to be a failure. At Notre Dame a BCS National Championship is the goal.

As head coach Brian Kelly said in his inaugural press conference, "There is a football coach, and there is the football coach at Notre Dame."

Kelly is now in his third season. Back in the Fall of 2010, his team had showed some early signs of improvement only to come up short against two nationally ranked opponents. They had taken the lead very late against Michigan only to relinquish their lead with .27 seconds remaining. Then, they lost on the road in overtime on a fake field goal to Michigan State that dropped their record to 1-3.

It was then that Kelly fell under harsh criticism. It didn't take long for the 'boo-birds' to come out. There were frequent comparisons to previous coaching regimes, namely Bob Davie, Tyrone Willingham, and Charlie Weiss who had all promised to resurrect the program but ultimately failed to do so. Kelly's critics were not limited to their fan base. There was also the media. He is not just a football coach. He is the football coach at Notre Dame and they treated him accordingly.

In the process they questioned his competency and questioned how his team could possibly bounce back from such devastating losses?

Here is what Kelly said at the time. "It's about belief. How much do we believe in what we're doing? How much do we believe in the process of how we prepare? Of how hard we work? How much do we believe in each other? And how much do we believe that we love the game of football and are we playing it for the right reasons?"

Moments later, a reporter asked one of their players the same question. He echoed his coach's sentiments, "It's about belief!"

Fast forward two years. Notre Dame is back on the college football map, so much so that ESPN's College Game Day brought their show to the campus in South Bend last Saturday morning- a sure sign of national relevance.

Brian Kelly did not wake up on Sunday morning fresh off an overtime win over Stanford, and suddenly begin preaching about belief. He didn't wait until his team was 6-0, ranked # 5 in the AP Top 25 poll, and begin singing Journey's "Don't Stop Believing!"

He spoke about belief at a time when his team was scuffling, at a time when fans and alumni turned on him and doomed him for certain failure, at a time when his back was against the wall, and at a time when the media literally wrote him off.

Most importantly, he did something that is extremely difficult to do- he conducted himself as a positive role model to young men during the hardest of times. That in turn is what allowed them to believe in him and to buy into his system. That is what I call dynamic leadership.

Of all the elements that go into building a national contender; top-flight coaching, recruiting exceptional talent, player development, strength and conditioning, scouting, in-game strategy and adjustments, which can this incredible turnaround be attributed to?

Its' about belief!