Business as usual



REX BROWN | THE JOURNAL
Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson said Monday that he and his teammates aren't thinking about the hype surrounding Saturday's game against Notre Dame at Memorial Stadium.

Tigers treating Irish visit as just another game

BY JD ELLIOTT
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — The dreary weather has had no effect on the mood in Clemson.

Notre Dame's comfortable victory against Massachusetts over the weekend sealed an undefeated showdown of top-15 teams in Memorial Stadium on Saturday night.

Not only Clemson is abuzz with anticipation. The recent resurgence of Clemson and the national prominence of Notre Dame have also caught the attention of ESPN, which has chosen Clemson as the destination for its weekly preview show "College GameDay," and the game between the No. 6 Irish and No. 12 Tigers will be broadcast nationwide on ABC at 8 p.m.

With all the hype surrounding the contest, players and coaches alike have fielded calls from friends and family for arguably the hardest ticket to find on the schedule.

Junior linebacker Ben Boulware, a native of Anderson, is familiar with the requests.

"I have guys that I haven't even talked to since high school saying 'Hey man, hook me up,' and I'm like you haven't even talked to me in three years and now you want a ticket, so it's kind of annoying," Boulware said.

While co-offensive coordinator Tony Elliott has also had his fair share of ticket requests, his strategy is to delegate the responsibility elsewhere.

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Who: No. 6 Notre Dame
When: Saturday, 8 p.m.
Where: Memorial Stadium
TV: ABC/WLOS-TV 13
Radio: WCCP 105.5 FM
Line: Pick 'em

TIGERS: Trying to ignore hype

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"They're not so much coming out of the woodwork, but I am about to cut my phone off and turn that responsibility over to my wife for the rest of the week," Elliott said. "Not only do you have high school coaches that want to come to the game that you want to make sure have the opportunity, but you have a lot of family and friends. A lot of the kids have been going through the same thing."

But despite the local and national hype for a matchup 36 years in the making — the two teams last met in South Bend, Ind., in 1979, with the Tigers winning 16-10 — the Clemson coaches and players are refraining from indulging in the hype.

Those connected with the program have had a difficult time forgetting about the last time "College GameDay" made an appearance in Clemson in 2013. A rare ACC meeting between top-five teams ended with No. 5 Florida State winning in decisive fashion, a 51-14 drubbing of No. 3 Clemson that sucked the energy out of the Tiger fans just minutes after the opening kickoff.

Sophomore quarterback Deshaun Watson was still a Gainesville High School Red Elephant the last time 'GameDay' came to Clemson, but was in the stadium as an unofficial visitor.

Watson does not expect the hype surrounding Saturday's game to be a distraction.

"With 'College GameDay' coming to town, it is going to be more exciting and more people in town," Watson said. "All the students are going to be asking questions, and it's something we need to balance out.

"Hype-wise, I really don't pay any attention to that. I'll let the fans and you guys take care of that. We worry about our team and what we have. The hype is just people's opinions, and really it's about how you perform on Saturdays."

Junior safety Jayron Kearse feels the same way.

"We're focusing on Clemson," Kearse said. "If we focus on what Clemson has to do then we will come out on top. If we focus on GameDay, being there or them being a top-10 team, that's when you lose focus and then things slip away, so we're just focusing on Clemson and doing what we have to do."

According to Watson, the coaching staff has been preaching a distinct message to the players that has nothing to do with "GameDay," the 2013 Florida State game or even Notre Dame.

"(We've been told) just to focus on what we have to really focus on and worry about everything else later on," Watson said. "Let the fans handle all the hype."

NOTES

Saturday will be Notre Dame's first visit to Clemson since 1977. The Irish won that game 21-17. ... Elliott said Monday the backup running back spot is "opened back up." Daniel High School alumnus C.J. Davidson had previously occupied that spot on the depth chart behind starter Wayne Gallman. Davidson, a senior who has carried the ball 15 times for 48 yards through the first three games, will likely be battled by junior Zac Brooks and sophomore Tyshon Dye.

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