

## Big House heartbreak

Notre Dame drops to 0-2 after emotional roller coaster in Ann Arbor

By ALLAN JOSEPH  
Sports Editor

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — It seemed the Irish had won. Then, improbably, all seemed lost. Somehow, Notre Dame regained the lead with merely 30 seconds left – and then, shockingly, stunningly, astonishingly, it was gone again. Through all of that, Irish coach Brian Kelly was left with only one thought after Notre Dame’s 35-31 loss at Michigan.

“We’re not good enough,” Kelly said. “There’s not one individual in that locker room, coaches included, who is good enough right now. Consequently, we lost the game ... When we’re better as a football team, we’ll start winning.”

Notre Dame (0-2) entered Michigan Stadium for the first night game in “Big House” history to face the Wolverines (2-0) and an NCAA-record crowd of 114,808. The Irish, however, used an effective opening drive to open up a quick 7-0 lead and take the crowd out of the game early. After the defense forced a three-and-out, Notre Dame again marched down the field on a 10-play, 83-yard drive to take a 14-0 lead just 5:55 into the contest. Despite the fast start, the Irish could not put the game out of the Wolverines’ reach.

“We started well,” Kelly said. “We’ve stumbled by making mistakes.”

The teams traded the ball a number of times before Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson found receiver Junior Hemingway for a 43-yard touchdown pass. Robinson accounted for 338 passing yards, 108 rushing yards, four passing touchdowns and one rushing touchdown by the end of the night.

“Obviously he’s a great player,” Irish sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees said. “He did a good job fighting back and leading his team.”

The Irish took a 17-7 lead into halftime, but the lead seemed small considering the Irish dominance on the statistical sheet. In the first half, Notre Dame had 15 first downs, 268 yards and 19:17 of possession while the Wolverines had only 3 first downs, 90 yards and 10:43 of possession. Irish junior running back Cierre Wood had 75 yards in the first half on his way to 134 total yards.

“[Cierre] ran the ball well,” Kelly said. “I thought we gave him an opportunity to run the ball effectively in a number of different looks.”

Notre Dame extended its lead to 24-7 near the end of the third quarter, and with 17 minutes left in the game, it seemed the Irish



SARAH O’CONNOR/The Observer

**Irish sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees completed 27 passes for 315 yards, but Rees was also responsible for three of Notre Dame’s five turnovers. The Irish lost 35-31 to the Wolverines in a game that saw 21 combined points in the last 72 seconds.**

had the game solidly in hand. Robinson, however, led Michigan on a quick scoring drive. The Wolverine drive was highlighted by a 77-yard pass from Robinson to Hemingway and a bizarre scoring play on which the Irish forced a goal-line fumble only to see the dreadlocked quarterback pick up the ball and scamper into the end zone untouched on the first play of the fourth quarter.

“There was no complacency,” Kelly said. “[The Irish] were locked into the game ... [Michigan] made some plays when they needed to.”

The unusual scoring play was only the first chapter in a wild fourth quarter.

After Michigan scored another touchdown to tighten the Irish margin to 24-21, Rees efficiently led Notre Dame to the Michigan 7-yard line before losing a fumble in a play that energized the Michigan faithful.

“The fumble, the interceptions — all of those were critical turnovers when we were moving the football,” Kelly said. “That’s not how we need to play.”

Robinson found Hemingway again for a 45-yard gain and

moved the Wolverines to within 30 yards of the end zone before Irish cornerback Robert Blanton seemingly sealed the game with an interception in the end zone with just 4:23 remaining. But it was not that simple, as Wood could not convert on third-and-one just three plays later, and Michigan got the ball back with 2:16 left in the game.

“In that scenario, we’ve got to check out of the play and we’ve got to throw the football because they had nine guys on the line of scrimmage,” Kelly said Sunday in his postgame teleconference. “We’ve got to continue to develop our third-and-short package with [Rees.]”

Robinson wasted no time in taking the lead, finding junior running back Vincent Smith for a 21-yard touchdown pass to put Michigan up 28-24 with merely 1:12 left on the clock.

But, with 72 seconds still on the clock, Rees would not let the Irish go down without a fight.

“We were confident we could go down the field,” he said. “The guys did a great job of hanging together and sticking with it after my turnover.”

The sophomore gunslinger

took advantage of good field position and a Michigan pass-interference penalty to find junior receiver Theo Riddick for a 29-yard touchdown pass with merely 30 seconds remaining on the clock.

“I was proud of [Rees] after he made the big mistake ... He came back and led our football team to a key drive on the road,” Kelly said. “He kept battling, and at the end you’re looking for your quarterback to lead you on the road, and he did a good job.”

While a three-point lead seemed secure with only half a minute remaining, Kelly said he was not comfortable even at that juncture in the game.

“I’m always thinking about the next situation and talking about making a stop,” Kelly said. “At 30 seconds, I wasn’t feeling comfortable.”

Kelly’s discomfort was justified in a turn of events that electrified the home crowd. Robinson found receiver Jeremy Gallon all alone on the right side of the field for a 64-yard pass, which placed the Wolverines at the Notre Dame 16-yard line with just eight seconds remaining. Rather than go for a tying field goal, Michigan

coach Brady Hoke elected to go for the end zone.

“They’re an explosive team and they want to make plays,” senior linebacker Darius Fleming said. “It didn’t shock me [that Michigan went for a touchdown.]”

Robinson found receiver Roy Roundtree in the corner of the end zone with just two seconds remaining to set off a raucous celebration in Michigan Stadium and cap off another rollicking edition of the Michigan-Notre Dame rivalry.

“Every time you see this game, you’re going to know that both teams are going to fight to the end,” Robinson said. “It’s never over until you see zeroes on the clock.”

After two disappointing losses, Irish junior linebacker Manti Te’o was nearly despondent after the game. But when asked if his team would be able to bounce back in time for next week’s matchup with Michigan State, Te’o had one, resolute response.

“We have to,” he said. “It’s not ‘will we’ or ‘can we.’ We have to.”

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### player of the game

**Denard Robinson**  
Michigan quarterback

*Robinson accounted for 446 total yards and five touchdowns on the night, including two in the last 72 seconds for the comeback victory.*

### stat of the game

**242 fourth-quarter yards**

*Michigan had 242 of its 452 total yards in the fourth quarter on its way to four fourth-quarter touchdowns.*

### play of the game

**Denard Robinson’s 64-yard pass to Jeremy Gallon late in the fourth quarter.**

*With only 30 seconds to take the ball 80 yards, Robinson’s 64-yard toss to Gallon set up the winning score.*

### quote of the game

*“We’re not good enough ... When we’re better as a football team, we’ll start winning.”*

**Brian Kelly**  
Irish coach



- report card
- B-

**quarterbacks:** Tommy Rees played well for most of the game, and his execution on the last drive was fantastic. His three turnovers cost the Irish dearly in the tight game.
- B+

**running backs:** Cierre Wood had another effective performance on the ground, and Jonas Gray added 66 useful yards. The backs struggled in short yardage, though, and Wood lost a fumble.
- B+

**receivers:** Michael Floyd had another big game, and Theo Riddick played much better than he did last week. Rees still seemed like he didn't have many options beyond Floyd.
- A-

**offensive line:** The best unit of the game, the line helped the Irish earn 198 rushing yards and didn't allow a sack. Still, they lost a couple of key short-yardage situations.
- B+

**defensive line:** While the ends did a fairly good job of containing the explosive Robinson, they rarely got pressure to the quarterback and gave Robinson plenty of time to throw.
- B

**linebackers:** The linebackers also played a key role in limiting Robinson's running ability. The last two Michigan drives were the linebackers' worst moments at the worst possible time.
- D+

**defensive backs:** Robert Blanton was the lone bright spot on a night that saw Gary Gray get beat often. The secondary made Robinson look like a much, much better passer than he actually is.
- B-

**special teams:** The Irish didn't have field position when they needed it, but Ben Turk, David Ruffer and the returners had better games this week than they did against South Florida.
- C-

**coaching:** While the first quarter went well, Notre Dame did not adjust well to Michigan blitzes. The lack of play-action was suspect, and the playcalling was very predictable.
- 2.41

**overall:** The Irish started fast and faded just as quickly. They made mistakes at the worst possible times, and it cost them a big win.

- adding up the numbers
- In his two meetings with Notre Dame, Denard Robinson has accounted for 948 of Michigan's 984 yards.

948
- 5

The Irish again committed five turnovers Saturday. Notre Dame lost three interceptions and two fumbles.
- Notre Dame now ranks last out of 120 Football Bowl Subdivision teams in the turnovers-lost category.

120
- 30.7

Robinson averaged 30.7 yards per completed pass, making each of his 11 completions a big play.
- The Irish had the ball for just over 37 minutes Saturday, an exceptionally high number for a Brian Kelly offense.

37
- 72

Notre Dame and Michigan combined for 21 points in the last 72 seconds of the game to create a wild finish.
- 
- SARAH O'CONNOR/The Observer
- Notre Dame and Michigan both donned special throwback uniforms Saturday in honor of the contest being the first night game in Michigan Stadium's 84-year history.
- # This is what college football is all about
- ANN ARBOR, Mich. — That's all you needed to see. If you knew nothing about college football, Irish football or the rivalry between Notre Dame and Michigan before, Saturday's game at Michigan Stadium is all you needed to see.
- 
- Chris Masoud  
Assistant Managing Editor
- Granted, I've never been to an SEC game under the lights, a Texas-Oklahoma shootout or a hundred other college football masterpieces, but there was something mystical about Saturday's contest that I've never experienced before and never will again. And it wasn't the throwback jerseys or the history behind a rivalry that has gone stale.

The first night game at the "Big House" certainly won't be the last. As predicted, Michigan fans filled the bowl until the stadium was just a sea of maize interspersed with the occasional blue or green. The Seven Nation Army chant raised the decibels to a new level, and I found out over 114,000 fans really do make a difference.

But who could have predicted the way the jumbotron lights danced off the student body's maize like lightning, or the full moon offset by a clear sky in place of expected showers or the final 72 seconds of a game that sent Notre Dame to an 0-2 record?
- Take yourself and this game out of context. Two unranked teams met on the second Saturday of September and produced one of the greatest finishes in college football history. Saturday night is the reason this sport exists. It's the reason fans sit through eight months of offseason workouts, booster-led scandals and recruiting updates — a chance to witness history.

But ultimately nothing can be taken out of context. After Saturday's loss, Notre Dame is headed down a very dangerous path that could send a season that began with BCS hopes just 10 days ago into an irrecoverable tailspin.

The quarterback situation couldn't be clearer. Rees looks awful throwing on the run, and as Kirk Herbsreit said Friday, "he can't move." Yet when Rees avoids throwing into triple coverage and feeds the ball to Michael Floyd, he's a very capable college quarterback. Most Irish fans will remember the sophomore's resiliency and leadership as he marched the team down the field 61 yards to what many thought was the game-winning touchdown in the final minute, following an inexplicable fumble on the prior series.

My moment of conversion came in the third quarter. Rees dropped back and waited, went through his progression, stayed in the pocket and led a cutting T.J. Jones with a throw that directed the receiver to the only available path to the end zone. Credit the offensive line, but also credit the patience of a quarterback who looks at ease in the pocket.

On the other side of the ball, I'm comfortable with eight (the front
- seven included) of the 11 starters on a defense that looked like the team's strength in week one, but turns out just isn't good enough.

That's ultimately what makes the first quarter of Saturday's loss — the best quarter I've seen in 40 games as a student — so painful. Notre Dame abused Michigan's defense, took a vacuum to the Big House noise and made Denard Robinson look like a Pop Warner quarterback for 15 minutes. But successful teams find a way to win (and sometimes struggling teams find a way to lose).

As Irish coach Brian Kelly said, the failures of this season don't stem from a lack of effort or desire. Robert Blanton and Manti Te'o don't chase down opponents from opposite sides of the field without that desire to win. The team, from the coaching staff to the players, just isn't good enough.

Right now.

As we move on to mid-September and a Michigan State team that could easily throw Notre Dame into an 0-3 hole and officially dash its BCS hopes, swallow the bitter pill of Saturday night, but don't forget it. That's how rivalries lose their passion.

Instead, remember the first night game in the Big House as it was. Remember every touchdown and blown coverage, remember the exhilaration and the heartbreak. Remember why you'll do it all again next week.
- The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily The Observer.  
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- Check out more coverage at  
ndsmcobserver.com



# Defense willing to take the blame



SARAH O'CONNOR/The Observer

Irish defenders try to tackle Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson. Robinson accounted for 446 total yards of offense and five touchdowns Saturday night, including three scores in the fourth quarter.

By CHRIS MASOUD  
Assistant Managing Editor

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Following a heart-wrenching 35-31 defeat at the hands of Michigan, many Irish fans have already begun the finger-pointing. While costly turnovers on offense and miscues on special teams contributed to the collapse, much of that pointing has been aimed squarely at the defense.

Heading into the fourth quarter with a 24-7 lead, the Wolverines posted four consecutive touchdown drives to steal a victory under the lights. Irish junior linebacker Manti Te'o said the experience was unlike any football he had ever played.

"Never, and it's something that I hope I don't experience again," Te'o said.

With the Irish down four points in the final minute, sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees connected with junior wide receiver Theo Riddick for a 29-yard score. Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson responded with his fourth touchdown of the quarter. In just three plays and 28 seconds, the junior led the Wolverines 80 yards down the field, denying Notre Dame its first win of the season.

"I'm surprised that obviously we weren't able to hold on," Irish coach Brian Kelly said. "Nobody would sit here and say, '30 seconds, you know, we've got a pretty good chance to win the game.' But I'm not stunned. I've been in this business way too long."

Notre Dame suffocated Robinson and the Michigan offense to start the game, forcing consecutive three-and-outs and a number of errant throws. Robinson finished the first half with

48 yards passing after completing just two of nine passes, along with 40 yards on the ground.

But the defense yielded in the second half, falling victim to a number of Robinson deep throws. Michigan receivers Junior Hemingway and Jeremy Gallon finished with a combined 243 yards catching and two touchdowns, including receptions of 77 and 43 yards.

No play was bigger than Gallon's 64-yard reception in the closing seconds of the half. Robinson connected with the uncovered receiver, who stretched the field and set up a 6-yard strike just one play later.

"We were in quarters coverage," Kelly said. "They ran double-post wheel. We're supposed to expand with that, and we didn't do a very good job of it."

Kelly expanded on that point in his teleconference Sunday.

"There's a couple of key coaching points on how you play that route," he said. "It's a very common route. It's not like it's something we haven't seen before, so we'll address that with those guys that were responsible for it."

Kelly added that fifth-year senior Gary Gray's position as a starter was not at stake. Gray was targeted on a number of Michigan passes, including Robinson's game-winning throw to receiver Roy Roundtree to seal the comeback.

"I mean, you just got to make the decision really," Kelly said. "Looking at Gary right now, he's a senior. If you're pulling him off the field, you're pretty much making a decision that we're going with a younger guy. We're not at that point with Gary."

Freshman cornerback Lo Wood has yet to see significant playing time at a position where experience can be much more valuable than potential. Kelly remains confident Gray will bounce back following an uncharacteristic start to the season.

"We're two games into the season," Kelly said. "He's got a lot of pride, and he's a guy that has shown that he can bounce back from a tough game. The cornerback position is such that you're put out on an island. Sometimes it doesn't go your way. I'm very confident Gary's going to bounce back next week."

Like Kelly, Te'o believes Notre Dame will make the necessary adjustments in practice to prevent a similar breakdown by the defense. Despite the noise and distraction brought by over 114,000 fans in Michigan Stadium, Te'o said the defense accepts full responsibility.

"That was all on us," he said. "Michigan fans provided us with a great atmosphere to play college football. I really appreciate them for this environment and this atmosphere, and I feel real privileged to be part of this game."

In spite of the tendency to point fingers and single out individual plays or players, Rees, like Kelly, attributes the loss to the team's overall inability to close out the game.

"We had confidence in our defense, but we didn't do enough ourselves," Rees said. "By no means are we pointing fingers — it's a team game. We still have confidence in the whole team."

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# Night game sets attendance mark

By ALLAN JOSEPH  
Sports Editor

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Saturday's contest was the first night game in Michigan Stadium's 84-year history. 114,804 fans attended the game, the largest crowd in history to attend a football game, collegiate or professional. This was the fourth time a Notre Dame-Michigan contest set a new NCAA attendance mark; the teams set records in 1993, 1999 and 2003, all at Michigan.

## Floyd sets more records

Senior wide receiver Michael Floyd added to his record-breaking career with a career-best 13 receptions, the second-most catches in a single game in Notre Dame history. With a 21-yard catch in the first

quarter, Floyd surpassed Golden Tate for the most receiving yards in Notre Dame history. Floyd's 159-yard effort was the 15th time he surpassed 100 yards in a game, tying him with Tate for the most 100-yard games in Irish history; Floyd has had at least 100 yards in 15 of the 32 games in which he has appeared. Saturday was the first time Floyd had more than 10 catches in two consecutive weeks.

## Last-minute heartbreak

Michigan's touchdown to take the lead with two seconds remaining in the game was the latest winning touchdown recorded by a Notre Dame opponent in Irish history, coming later than Matt Leinart's score during the 2005 Notre Dame-USC game. Irish wide receiver

er Theo Riddick's touchdown with 30 seconds remaining would have been the sixth-latest game-winning touchdown in Notre Dame history.

## Irish rushing falls short

Junior running back Cierre Wood and senior running back Jonas Gray combined for 200 yards on the ground Saturday. Wood had 134 yards on 25 carries, while Gray added 66 yards on just six carries. The 35-31 loss, however, marked the first time in 28 games Notre Dame lost when outrushing its opponent. The last time the Irish lost despite winning the ground game was in 2004, when Notre Dame fell 31-28 to Oregon State in the Insight Bowl.

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# scoring summary

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total
ND	14	3	7	7	31
UM	0	7	0	28	35

## First quarter

Notre Dame 7, Michigan 0  
Theo Riddick 7-yd pass from Tommy Rees (David Ruffer kick) with 9:05 remaining  
Drive: 7 plays, 57 yards, 3:46 elapsed

Notre Dame 14, Michigan 0  
Cierre Wood 4-yd run (David Ruffer kick) with 1:56 remaining  
Drive: 10 plays, 83 yards, 5:35 elapsed

## Second quarter

Notre Dame 14, Michigan 7  
Junior Hemingway 43-yd pass from Denard Robinson (Brendan Gibbons kick) with 10:18 remaining  
Drive: 2 plays, 48 yards, 0:48 elapsed

Notre Dame 17, Michigan 7  
David Ruffer 38-yd field goal with 1:40 remaining  
Drive: 8 plays, 29 yards, 2:53 elapsed

## Third quarter

Notre Dame 24, Michigan 7  
T.J. Jones 15-yd pass from Rees (David Ruffer kick) with 2:13 remaining  
Drive: 7 plays, 71 yards, 3:55 elapsed

## Fourth quarter

Notre Dame 24, Michigan 14  
Denard Robinson 1-yd run (David Ruffer kick) with 14:54 remaining  
Drive: 4 plays, 83 yards, 2:19 elapsed

Notre Dame 24, Michigan 21  
Jeremy Gallon 14-yd pass from Denard Robinson (Brendan Gibbons kick) with 10:47 remaining  
Drive: 5 plays, 40 yards, 2:35 elapsed

Notre Dame 24, Michigan 28  
Vincent Smith 21-yd pass from Denard Robinson (Brendan Gibbons kick) with 1:12 remaining  
Drive: 5 plays, 58 yards, 1:04 elapsed

Notre Dame 31, Michigan 28  
Theo Riddick 29-yd pass from Tommy Rees (David Ruffer kick) with 0:30 remaining  
Drive: 4 plays, 61 yards, 0:42 elapsed

Notre Dame 31, Michigan 35  
Roy Roundtree 16-yd pass from Denard Robinson (Brendan Gibbons kick) with 0:02 remaining  
Drive: 3 plays, 80 yards, 0:30 elapsed

# statistics

rushing yards



passing yards



time of possession



passing			
Rees	27-39-315	Robinson	11-24-338
rushing			
Wood	25-134	Robinson	16-108
receiving			
Floyd	13-159	Hemingway	3-165





PAT COVENEY/The Observer



SARAH O'CONNOR/The Observer

# Night game nightmare

The first-ever night game at Michigan Stadium was one for the ages, as Notre Dame and Michigan battled to a wild finish that gave the Wolverines a 35-31 victory over the Irish. A record crowd of 114,808 witnessed Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson put up another astonishing performance against the Irish, as Robinson accounted for 446 yards and five touchdowns. The two teams combined for 35 points in the fourth quarter, 21 of which came in the final 1:12. The loss dropped Notre Dame to 0-2; the Irish host Michigan State this Saturday.



PAT COVENEY/The Observer



SARAH O'CONNOR/The Observer



PAT COVENEY/The Observer

Clockwise from top: Michigan receiver Junior Hemingway scores a touchdown; Notre Dame sophomore receiver T.J. Jones tiptoes down the sideline; Michigan cornerback J.T. Floyd holds Irish receiver Michael Floyd; Notre Dame safety Jamoris Slaughter looks at Wolverine receiver Kelvin Grady; Irish quarterback Tommy Rees fumbles.