

# IRISH INSIDER

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OBSERVER

## TEXAS TRIO

From Dallas to South Bend,  
nothing can separate these three.



Photo Illustration by Suzanna Pratt and Brandon Keelean



# Don't worry too much, conference play is here

Randy Waldrum must be pulling his hair.

Thanks to 162 victories, six NCAA College Cups and two NCAA titles at Notre Dame, he still has plenty. But not even the Irish coach can explain the frustration of a 3-3-1 start for an Irish team loaded with some of the most talented players in the nation.

Granted, most teams don't follow up a championship season with the nation's toughest schedule, at least by choice. All three of Notre Dame's losses this season have come on the road at the hands of top-10 teams, and they've outplayed all of them for the majority of each contest.

In a loss to then-No. 3 North Carolina, the Irish edged the Tar Heels in shots, shots on goal and corner kicks earned, but fell in overtime 2-1.

In a 3-1 loss to then-No. 10 Duke, the Irish outplayed the Blue Devils in virtually every statistical category but the one that matters, yielding three goals in a 12-minute span.

Perhaps most disheartening, a 2-1 loss to then-No. 2 Stanford, the Irish took a 1-0 lead into the final 10 minutes of the match before the Cardinal mounted a comeback. Notre Dame followed up that performance with a lackluster effort the next day, earning a tie against then-No.17 Santa Clara.

It's not talent or experience. All-American Melissa Henderson has time and again proved she's the most talented forward in the country, averaging a goal per game. Hermann Trophy semifinalist Courtney Barg has started all but one game at the midfield position after missing



**Chris Masoud**  
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most of last season due to injury. College Cup Most Outstanding Defensive Player Jessica Schuveiler leads the backfield in her third-year as a team captain.

Yet the Irish head into Friday's Big East opener against Louisville with a .500 record to their name and no victories on the road. Maybe it's a championship hangover, but the 2011 squad has failed to bring the same tenacity and edge it brought to the 2010 College Cup after being handed a No. 4 seed by the NCAA tournament committee.

While North Carolina and Stanford surely came into their contests motivated to beat the team that ended their seasons in the tournament last year, a preseason No. 1 ranking for Notre Dame certainly didn't help either.

Maybe it's the loss of a core group of seniors desperate to win a championship after being so close in 2008. Waldrum was tasked with replacing players both on the field and in the locker room.

Then again, maybe history will simply repeat itself.

Waldrum has never opened up a new year with a soft schedule, always hoping to discover his team's flaws before they crop up in the postseason. The Irish coach has developed a program that simply doesn't take a year off.

Notre Dame traditionally finds its stride in the Big East, having dropped a total of seven games and yielding only seven ties since 1991.

Most importantly, it's only September. The postseason is nearly two months away, more than enough time for a coach who reassembled a team in the week-and-a-half preceding the 2010 tournament.

Maybe it's just time to relax.

*The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Observer.*

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# Irish start conference play



GRANT TOBIN/The Observer

**Senior All-American forward Melissa Henderson battles for the ball in Notre Dame's 7-1 win over Tulsa on Sept. 2. Henderson scored a goal and recorded two assists.**

By JACK HEFFERON  
Sports Writer

When the Irish scheduled away matches at top-5 opponents Duke, North Carolina and Stanford in their early season schedule, their hope was that it would leave them better prepared for a repeat run at a national championship. Despite losing those three contests, No. 14/12 Notre Dame (3-3-1) feels the lessons it learned will ultimately help as the Big East season begins.

"That's why we play a schedule like that," Irish coach Randy Waldrum said. "You need these games early to get exposed. We didn't want to lose those matches, but now we know we can play those teams. Now we just need to stay focused and not lose our confidence."

One area where that early stretch helped the Irish was with their inexperience off the bench. With key players like senior midfielder Courtney Barg and freshman midfielder Karin Simonian out due to injury, underclassmen were called on to play big minutes in their absence. With the team now beginning to get healthy again, the roster looks much deeper.

"Depth and inexperience have been issues for us," Waldrum said. "We haven't been able to have a consis-

tent group of players on the field yet this season. We were forced to go deep in our roster early on, but them having to play will help us in the long run.

"We should have [Simonian] and [junior defender] Jazmin Hall available this weekend, but we've still got a couple of people banged up. It's something we've got to work through."

Getting a cohesive 11 on the field will be crucial for Notre Dame as it heads into Big East play. After claiming last year's regular season championship, the Irish were ousted by Connecticut in their first match at the conference tournament. Waldrum believes the team is ready to take on the conference and exceed last season's performance.

"We try to split up the season, and now we're headed into Big East play," he said. "We have a great conference in the Big East, but there's no team in it better than the Dukes, the Carolinas and the Stanfords we've played so far. We want the regular season title, and then we want to take the Big East championship that next weekend. If we perform the way we should, we'll win."

First up on the road to a conference championship is a pair of matches this weekend. Notre Dame will open Big East play Friday against Louisville at Alumni Field. The Cardinals (2-4-1) are an exciting, unpre-

dictable side led by sophomore forward Christine Exeter, the reigning Big East Rookie of the Year.

"Louisville has the same players almost every year, but their team is always up and down in the standings," Waldrum said. "They have five Canadian kids who played well for them as freshmen, and Exeter is a very good player up top. They're going to be a difficult matchup for us."

After Friday's match, the Irish will hit the road to face Cincinnati on Sunday. Waldrum believes that between the team's attitude and a unique home field advantage, a trip to play the Bearcats (4-2-2) is always a challenge.

"Cincinnati is always a hard-working, blue-collar team," he said. "[Cincinnati coach] Michelle Salmon always gets a lot out of those kids. It's also very tough going there because their facility isn't very good. With the AstroTurf there, it can be hard for our kids to get into a rhythm, and that really levels the playing field."

And while Cincinnati may have a home-field advantage, Waldrum and the Irish hope that Alumni Stadium continues to be a difficult place to visit.

"Around this time last year we were about 20th in attendance," Waldrum said. "This year, we're in the top six, and that's been great for the team. We're thankful to the student body for all the support they've shown so far, and let's try to keep that going."

Notre Dame and Louisville will kick off at 5 p.m. Friday at Alumni Stadium. The Irish will then head to Cincinnati for a 3:30 p.m. start Sunday.

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# Texas three-step

Henderson, Barg and Schuveiller collected titles for the better part of a decade, now focus on repeating

By ANDREW GASTELUM  
Sports Writer

Nine years ago and more than 1,000 miles south of Notre Dame, amid awkward icebreakers and handshakes, an unbreakable bond formed between Jessica Schuveiller, Courtney Barg and Melissa Henderson. Nowadays, that bond is best seen in a defensive clearance followed by crisp midfield passing and finished off with a rip into the back of the net.

“College [consists of] the best four years of your life, and it might as well be spent with some great people,” senior forward Henderson said. “I am so thankful to have [Schuveiller and Barg]. The time has just flown by with them.”

The trio met in seventh grade, when they joined the Dallas Texans club team, and have been inseparable since. Their time together has taken them from Texas plains to South Bend winters to overseas stints with the U.S. National Team, yet the smooth transition from club to high school to college soccer remains the group’s most cherished asset.

“It’s honestly been a blessing to be able to come to a school so far away and have such a close group of us to always be around,” senior defender Schuveiller said. “It’s like a part of your family came to school with you. It made the transition so much easier, and we became

even closer.”

Henderson echoed that sentiment, adding that their familiarity brings a level of comfort that takes years to produce.

“We started playing as kids and it’s nice to have a piece of home here with you,” Henderson said. “We already had experience playing together as a group so just being here together created a comfort zone for us.”

That comfort zone was evident in the trio’s crowning achievement: a NCAA national championship last year.

“We had come so close in club and everybody dreams about that moment in college,”

Schuveiller said. “Seeing the College Cup as a kid and then actually being on the field to experience the win was really surreal.”

Led by Schuveiller — the 2010 College Cup Most Outstanding Defensive Player — the Irish defense shut out five of their six opponents in

the 2010 NCAA tournament and outscored their opponents 15-1. Henderson was the tournament’s Most Outstanding Offensive Player with three goals and four assists, and Barg, a senior midfielder, returned from an injury that sidelined her for two months to provide much-needed stability and balance to the Irish midfield for the championship run. The now tri-captains served as critical pieces to Irish coach Randy Waldrum’s third national title, something

that Schuveiller credits to Waldrum’s system of developing players.

“Year-in and year-out he has players getting national recognition,” Schuveiller said. “It’s really a testament to how great of a coach he is.”

In 2008, Waldrum heavily recruited the club teammates, who followed their club coach to the Dallas Sting before winning a club team state title. They each cut their high school careers short, using their senior years to focus more on club competition and the college recruiting circuit.

“[Waldrum] was such a huge draw in the recruiting process, knowing that he was coaching [at Notre Dame],” Barg said. “I had heard such good things about him and then to come here and play under him, I feel like I have learned so much.”

In the last three-plus seasons, the Irish have tallied up a 71-10-4 record under Waldrum and have made three consecutive College Cups, a feat that has come with increased dedication and discipline.

“In club, you can only learn so much because you only practice a few times a week,” Schuveiller said. “But in college you are out here every day and go over things until they are engrained in your mind.”

Schuveiller, the team’s vocal leader, has been a consistent force for Waldrum’s backline throughout her college career, starting in 85 games since coming to Notre Dame. The marketing major also became the first player in Notre Dame women’s soccer history to be voted by her teammates as a three-time captain, even though she calls herself fortunate to have joined her close friends coming out of high school.

“Obviously Mel and Courtney are such amazing players, I



SUZANNA PRATT/The Observer

Senior defender Jessica Schuveiller clears the ball in Notre Dame’s 2-0 win over Wisconsin at Alumni Stadium on Aug. 19.

was just thrilled to find out that I was going to be on the same team with them,” she said.

Yet accompanied by her humility, Schuveiller brings a tenacity crucial to being a successful defender.

When an Indiana attacker slid in for a rough tackle on the senior defender in Notre Dame’s 4-1 win Sept. 4, Schuveiller was the first to let her opponent know that the challenge was unwarranted — bumping the Hoosier which led to a face-to-face confrontation.

“I had a few choice words with [the Indiana forward] and I had to put her in her place,” Schuveiller said with a grin.

Schuveiller also makes darting runs through the midfield that relies on a fluid connection with Barg — an All-American selection in 2009 — who serves as the offense’s facilitator and heads the Irish’s axis of passing.

“You want to pass the ball in this offense, because you know the players around you are capable of finishing, especially with Jess coming out of the back. She makes so many things happen for us,” said Henderson, a psychology major. “And if we go through Courtney, we can connect to anywhere on the field because she has a feel for where everybody is on the field.”

Henderson, meanwhile, has already scored seven goals for the Irish in seven games, including a hat trick against Indiana to win the adidas Invitational title. The 2010 Hermann Trophy runner-up is currently tied for seventh on the Notre Dame all-time scoring list with 59 career goals and holds the record for most goals in a single postseason with nine in 2009.

She also remains the only high school junior to be awarded the Gatorade National High School Player of the Year in 2007 and was an ESPY nominee this past

summer for Best College Female Athlete. And even though the senior from Garland, Texas is the favorite to take this year’s Hermann Trophy for best collegiate soccer player, Henderson’s focus is steadfastly team-oriented as the Irish look to defend their title.

“It’s an honor to be mentioned among all those great players and great teams but it really comes down to how our team is doing and helping us to win games,” the forward said. “Our team is not really worried about how we are perceived by others. Our main focus is playing one game at a time and making sure that we are prepared to play as a team in every aspect of our game.”

The group takes inspiration in Notre Dame alum Shannon Boxx, who represented the runner-up U.S. National Team at the 2011 World Cup.

“It is really cool to see a Notre Dame player representing the United States,” Schuveiller said. “To see her there, knowing that she went through all of the same training and drills that we are currently doing is really exciting.”

Now that the trio has collected a club state championship, a high school state title — between Barg and Schuveiller — and a NCAA national championship, the only thing missing would be a World Cup, a prospect that each of the three dodged with wide smiles and the attitude of a defending champ with conference play coming up.

“We can’t even think that far ahead right now,” Barg said. “Right now we are just focused on the season ahead.”

The prospect of one day uniting under the Stars and Stripes remains bright, but first, after nine years and countless trips, they have a title to defend.



SUZANNA PRATT/The Observer

Senior midfielder Courtney Barg drives past her Wisconsin defender in Notre Dame’s 2-0 win Aug. 19 in the season opener at Alumni Stadium.

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# Trio’s rise to glory began at club level with Dallas Sting

By MEGAN GOLDEN  
Sports Writer

With a front row seat for six years of the Notre Dame tri-captains’ careers, Dallas Sting coach Kenny Medina played a crucial role in their development. Once he was done with them, both on and off the field, he sent them off to a friend and mentor at Notre Dame.

Forward Melissa Henderson, midfielder Courtney Barg and defender Jessica Schuveiller, all seniors, began their tutorial under Medina in seventh grade.

“I’ve had the best seat in the house,” Medina said. “You get the perspective not only from the stands but also [from] coaching them, driving them to be better [and] also the times you get to have a good laugh with them. To have those three and the caliber of players we have, I just don’t know when we’ll have another trio like that again.”

The glimpses of leadership that these three seniors showed early in their careers made it obvious they were going to be special players. An avid soccer fan, Medina was not surprised when he heard his former players were named tri-captains.

“Courtney wasn’t our outspoken leader, but she spoke very inwardly to her team,” he said. “Her team always knew the message, but it wasn’t as transparent to [me]. Jessica was a lot more vocal; we called her our gladiator. When everyone couldn’t go anymore, she kept persevering, persevering, persevering. She was always able to fight through.”

“Melissa’s leadership came through the way she performed on the field. What she does right now — she was doing it when she was younger. Her actions spoke louder than her words.”

Medina vividly remembers a game in San Antonio the team

was losing 3-0 at halftime. The game served as a learning experience for the entire team and highlighted the trio’s leadership.

“I hadn’t said much in the game,” he said. “I’m a pretty driven coach, and I drive my players pretty hard,” he said. “I challenged them at halftime to let them know I can sit on the bench and not get up, or [I can] coach you like I coach you and we can win.”

The team rallied to score four goals in the second half and win the match. Medina had his team so fired up, he said, that the opposing coach refused to shake his hand following the game.

“I [told my team], ‘Just trust me, I’m not trying to break you; I’m trying to define you,’” he said. “The other coach ended up wanting to attack me because I was driving them so hard. We had such a laugh out of it, but it was a big trust and safety thing that we persevered there.”

Medina said he knew long ago the three would be successful in college, compiling honors, awards and titles.

“There was no doubt about it in my mind,” he said. “They each bring something a little different to the game. That’s what makes Notre Dame so special because they’re very committed, dedicated and driven for the team. It’s not a situation where it is a selfish thing, and that’s what makes them so special.”

Despite being considered superstars by fans, the Irish captains shy away from their stardom and credit their team for getting them to this point in their careers. Medina stressed some things — like Henderson’s character — never change.

“I think that’s the best thing she does say about herself — the things she doesn’t say about herself. She is such a quality person and [appreci-



Seniors Jessica Schuveiller, left, Melissa Henderson, center, and Courtney Barg have been teammates since the seventh grade when they played for the Dallas Sting.

ates that] she has God-given talent. She is so humble because she gets it. She has not abused it, but she uses it for the good.”

Barg, Henderson and Schuveiller may not know how much their former coach is cheering for them to become the best. In fact, Medina admitted that he doubts they even know he is a fan at all.

“If you asked them about me, they’d say, ‘Kenny was so hard on us, and he probably didn’t like us,’” he said. “I talk about those kids all the time. They were always part of the team, and I never had the feeling that their accolades and how good they were got in the way.”

When asked if he had any advice to offer the team captains four years later, Medina took a minute to imagine being back on the field as their coach, friend and now biggest fan.

“I’ve said too many things throughout the years,” he said. “As far as I’m concerned,

from my perspective, let them know how much I miss them and how much I follow them. Tell them to cherish every opportunity they get to step on the field, and [tell them] that they’ve been a lot of joy to a lot of people when we can see them play.”

Medina has not had the opportunity to watch his former players during their careers at Notre Dame, but he said he is just one phone call away from making the trip.

“I am waiting for an invitation from my [former] coach,” he said.

Irish coach Randy Waldrum, an Irving, Texas, native, was Medina’s soccer coach when Medina was just 14 years old. Throughout Medina’s coaching career, several of his players have elected to continue their soccer careers at Notre Dame. At one point, there were as many as six of Medina’s former players on the Irish roster.

“The big joke is, ‘Boy, if I send all those kids to Randy,

it’s not because it’s Randy or Notre Dame, but because he did a lot for me as a youth player,’” he said. “Randy was my favorite [coach] by far. He believed in me as a youth, and he knew his X’s and O’s as good as anybody.”

In a similar manner, Medina believed in Barg, Henderson and Schuveiller, a grouping that is indeed rare in nature.

“A class like that doesn’t come around very often, and to me, [fans should] take this opportunity to understand that three young ladies of that caliber is very unusual,” he said. “There are schools that have more than three quality players on their team, but these girls all came from Dallas, played for the same club team and experienced a lot together throughout all these years. They have not been stagnant; they have persevered and gotten better and better.”

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<div>COURTNEY BARG</div> 	<div>MELISSA HENDERSON</div> 	<div>JESSICA SCHUVEILLER</div> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ 2010 NCAA College Cup All-Tournament Team</li><li>▶ 2009 NSCAA first-team All-American</li><li>▶ 2009 Big East Midfielder of the Year</li><li>▶ 2009 Hermann Trophy semifinalist</li><li>▶ 2009 first team all-Big East selection</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ 2010 NCAA College Cup Most Outstanding Offensive Player</li><li>▶ Named to U.S. U-23 squad in 2010</li><li>▶ 2010 Hermann Trophy runner-up</li><li>▶ 2007 Gatorade National High School Player of the Year</li><li>▶ Tied for seventh on Notre Dame’s all-time scoring list with 59 goals</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ 2010 NCAA College Cup Most Outstanding Defensive Player</li><li>▶ Named to U.S. U-23 squad in 2010</li><li>▶ Starter all 85 matches in her Irish career</li><li>▶ 2009 first team all-Big East selection</li><li>▶ Only player to be named three-time captain in Notre Dame history</li></ul>