

# IRISH INSIDER

NOTRE DAME 50, NAVY 10 | **MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2012** | NDSMCOBSERVER.COM

## Business trip

*Notre Dame outrushes Navy's triple option en route to a 50-10 victory at Aviva Stadium in Dublin*

By **ANDREW OWENS**  
Assistant Managing Editor

DUBLIN — In a series of events nearly as rare as Notre Dame playing a football game abroad, it was the Irish who controlled the ground game to run away with a 50-10 season-opening victory against Navy at Aviva Stadium in Dublin on Saturday.

Fueled by a dominating two-pronged rushing effort, Notre Dame (1-0) rolled to its second consecutive blowout win against Navy (0-1), after struggling mightily against the Midshipmen during the previous five seasons.

"I think the story for me was being able to control both lines offensively and defensively," said Irish coach Brian Kelly, whose squad nearly doubled Navy's rushing yardage output by the count of 293-149.

Notre Dame's defensive play wasn't pristine, but it refused to break for most of the day, forcing four turnovers and recording a critical fourth-down stop early in the contest.

With the Irish leading 6-0 in the first quarter, sophomore Ishaq Williams tackled Navy quarterback Trey Miller a yard short of the first down marker at the Irish 30-yard-line. A play later, seniors Manti Te'o and Dan Fox pushed Miller back for no gain, giving the ball back to the offense.

"I think we're just carrying on where we were last year as a defense that's very stingy against the run," Kelly said. "That's a huge reason why. We're very blessed with a physical group, a great scheme, they're well-coached and it's not often you can hold Navy down to 10 points."

Four plays after the turnover of possession, sophomore George Atkinson broke away for a 56-yard romp to the end zone, providing the Irish a 13-0 lead they would never come close to relinquishing.

"We felt the strength of our football team laid up front," Kelly said. "We believe we've got physical backs, with home run ability with George, [senior running back Theo Riddick] ran physical and has great instincts. Cam McDaniel came in and of course you can't forget Robby Toma's run, because he's going to talk about it for the next six months."

Atkinson rushed for 99 yards and scored two touchdowns on nine carries, while Riddick compiled 107 yards on 19 carries with two scores in the absence of starting running back Cierre Wood, who was suspended for two games

last week.

In his debut as the starting signal caller for the Irish, sophomore Everett Golson completed 12-of-18 pass attempts for 144 yards, a touchdown and an interception.

"I thought he managed the game and made one bad decision when he threw the interception, but the great thing about Everett is he picks it up," Kelly said. "He's not going to make the same mistake twice. Other than that, I was really pleased with the leadership, the ability to get in the right plays and keep our offense running."

"We knew what we were getting with Everett. It's not like we didn't know what we were getting."

Golson's five-yard touchdown pass to senior tight end Tyler Eifert came early in the second quarter to widen Notre Dame's advantage to 20-0. It was the second consecutive fade throw to Eifert, as he fell just out of bounds on the first attempt. Eifert also made contributions out wide in the passing game and in run blocking.

"It's versatility," Kelly said. "There's matchup problems with [sophomore tight end] Troy Niklas on the field too. They just make it really difficult by having them and [sophomore tight end] Ben Koyack on the field."

"When you utilize [Eifert] as a wide receiver and someone who can block for the backfield, you have a very special player and we want to utilize his talents. That's why he does [so] many things and does them so well."

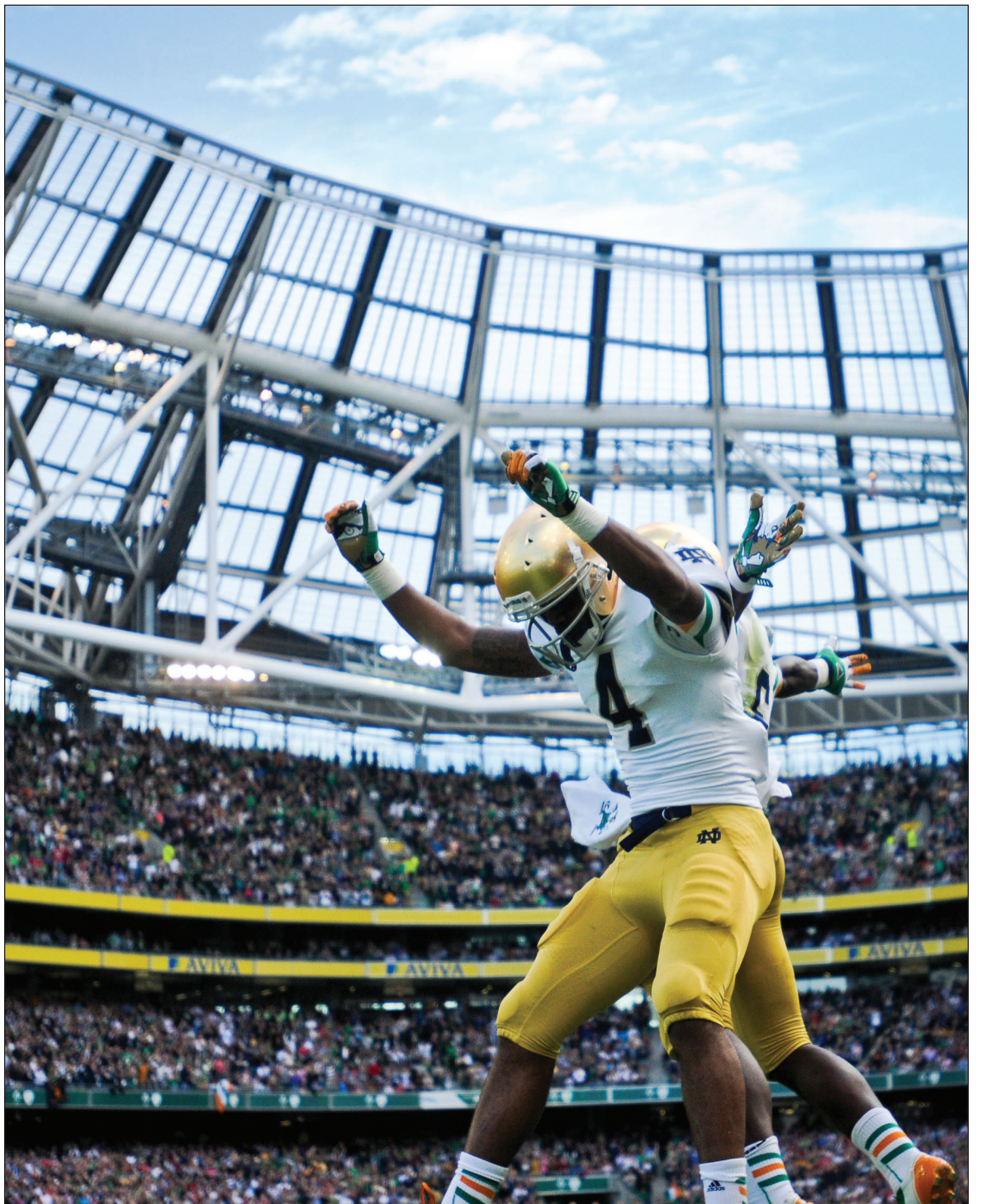
Sophomore Stephon Tuitt picked up a Miller fumble and rumbled 77 yards to the end zone to put the Irish ahead 27-0. In his first collegiate score, the 303-pound defensive end was able to outrun the Navy offense and record the longest Irish fumble return since Steve Lawrence's 79-yarder in 1985. It was the third longest in school history.

"Stephon is a tremendous athlete with some speed," Te'o said. "When you see No. 7, he can outrun pretty much any skill player on offense."

Te'o highlighted the Irish defense with the fourth-down stop, as well as a fumble recovery and interception — both career firsts. He totaled six tackles to begin his senior season.

The win puts the Irish on strong footing to start the 2012 campaign, which contrasts sharply with last year's season-opening loss at home against South Florida.

"They looked at last season as we did as coaches. Each player took it upon themselves to pay attention



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

**Sophomore running back George Atkinson celebrates a touchdown in Notre Dame's 50-10 victory over Navy on Saturday at Aviva Stadium in Dublin.**

to all of those little things that are necessary to be successful," Kelly said. "I think it's a cumulative effect of everybody coming together and doing the little things."

Twenty-one Irish players saw their first collegiate game action in the 40-point blowout as a way to build depth moving forward this season, Kelly said.

"We got a lot of young players valuable experience today to go along with our veterans on our football team," he said.

Navy mustered its only touchdown on the first series of the third quarter on a three-play, 75-yard drive that culminated in a 25-yard strike from Miller to receiver Shawn Lynch. All three plays on the drive were passes.

Despite the big plays allowed by the inexperienced Irish secondary — which includes KeiVarae

Russell, the first cornerback to start as a freshman in school history — Kelly said he was pleased with the unit's play.

"I thought they did some good things," he said. "I was really excited about their ability to go out and compete. Regarding experience

they got today was great for us as we move on to our next challenge, playing Purdue. We'll enjoy this for 24 hours and get ready for a great rivalry game against Purdue."

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## PLAYER OF THE GAME

**THEO RIDDICK**  
NOTRE DAME RUNNING BACK

In his first game at the position since 2009, Riddick rushed for 107 yards and two touchdowns on 19 carries. The senior was the go-to player on third downs as well and averaged 5.6 yards per carry while filling the void left by starting running back Cierre Wood's two-game suspension.



# REPORT CARD

B

## QUARTERBACKS

Making his first start, Everett Golson impressed with 144 yards and his first career touchdown pass in the second quarter. More importantly, the sophomore didn't make any major mistakes besides a red-zone interception.

A

## RUNNING BACKS

The Irish have not rushed for more yards in a game since 2003 and were without their starter in Cierre Wood. Theo Riddick and George Atkinson led the dominant rushing attack which accumulated 293 yards on 46 carries.

B

## RECEIVERS

Three receivers made their first career receptions as the young receiving corps made some key blocks on the perimeter to help out the rushing attack. Although, a few dropped passes marred a near-stellar effort.

A

## OFFENSIVE LINE

The front five dominated the trenches throughout the game, taking pressure off Golson and helping the Irish outrush the Midshipmen. That makes 12 rushing TDs for the Irish in team's last two meetings.

A

## DEFENSIVE LINE

Louis Nix and Stephon Tuitt each recorded three tackles, including 2.5 tackles for a loss. The line set up camp in the Navy backfield, constantly disrupted the triple-option. And Tuitt even returned a fumble 77 yards for a score.

A-

## LINEBACKERS

What most considered the strongest part of this Irish defense certainly lived up to the hype. Led by preseason All-American Manti Te'o — who recorded both his first fumble recovery and interception — the Irish limited Navy to its lowest rushing output in almost two years.

C-

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

The supposed weakness coming into the season on defense certainly looked like it. The secondary was caught out of position often and gave up 192 yards to a triple-option attack.

D

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The kicking game couldn't do much, muffing two extra points, which could prove to be crucial in close games. On a good note, Davonte Neal nearly quadrupled Notre Dame's 2011 regular season punt return yards with an 11-yard return.

B+

## COACHING

The Irish coaching staff did enough to stifle the triple-option attack and ease into the Golson era smoothly.

## OVERALL GPA: 3.1

Putting up 50 points was definitely a plus for the Irish and the strong running game took a lot of pressure off Everett Golson. But there are some glaring weaknesses for the Irish, with the biggest being the performance of the secondary against a pass-reluctant team. Things won't be this easy against the likes of Landry Jones and Matt Barkley.

# PLAY OF THE GAME

## STEPHON TUITT'S 77-YARD FUMBLE RETURN FOR A TOUCHDOWN

Following a red-zone interception, Navy put together its first threatening drive, consisting of 12 plays for 68 yards. But with 2:12 left in the second quarter, Tuitt picked up Trey Miller's fumble — caused by interior pressure from the Irish defensive line — and took it to the endzone to give the Irish an insurmountable 27-0 lead before the half.



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

*Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson looks downfield as he scrambles outside of the pocket. Golson threw for 144 yards and one touchdown on 12-for-18 passing in his first career start.*

# Notre Dame displays newfound confidence



**Allan Joseph**  
Editor-in-Chief

DUBLIN — There are plenty of reasons to see Notre Dame's season-opening victory over Navy as some sort of fluke. The Midshipmen are young and not at their best. The Irish secondary showed some glaring holes. The Irish benefited from turnovers on lucky bounces. To look at the game that way, however, is to miss the forest for the trees.

Saturday's contest was a promising step for the rest of the season and beyond. Two years ago, in the midst of Brian Kelly's first season at the helm, the Irish played sloppily in every facet of the game. Simple run blocking was nearly impossible, the defense missed an astounding number of assignments and you could forget about the quarterback consistently throwing catchable passes. The Irish had their occasional moments of brilliance — such as a gutty win at USC — but overall, they were in a pretty sorry state.

If the 50-10 victory over Navy was any indication, this season promises to be a different experience. It started in the trenches. The Notre Dame offensive front used to be not much more than a speed bump for

opposing defenders, and a small one at that. Now, led by captain Zack Martin, the line seems to relish pushing defensive linemen around; running backs Theo Riddick and George Atkinson can attest to the width of the holes they got to run through this weekend. The Irish defensive line a few years ago was supposed to be impressively strong and quick; it turned out to be neither. Now, athletes like Stephon Tuitt and Kapron Lewis-Moore can go both through and around blockers — and as Tuitt demonstrated, they're pretty fast too.

The success of the offensive and defensive fronts meant the Irish could establish a rhythm in the rushing attack, and the ability of Notre Dame receivers to block on the perimeter meant Riddick and Atkinson had room to break big plays open like Atkinson's 56-yard touchdown scamper. With a talented line leading the way, the Irish defense could pressure the quarterback, stop short-yardage runs and even force turnovers. None of these were regular occurrences just two years ago.

Obviously, Notre Dame has a bevy of aspects to improve upon as well. The secondary has to do a better job of adjusting to new wrinkles. There were too many

dropped passes. The special teams were positively atrocious, with two missed extra points and some scary moments on both ends of punts. But this time, Irish fans can start believing those things will actually get better, because for the first time since 2005, Notre Dame is playing with true confidence.

Last year's squad thought it had the potential to win every game, but it didn't expect to. There's a different vibe coming from this group. Whether it's Navy or USC, Wake Forest or Oklahoma, this team will go into the game expecting to win; they'll work on everything and anything to do so. It's been too long since that type of atmosphere pervaded the Irish locker room.

It'll still be a year filled with ups and downs. The schedule is too tough to expect the nascent confidence to translate into a BCS berth. Mistakes will be made, weaknesses will be exposed and the Irish will lose a few games. If you replay the Emerald Isle Classic in your head, though, you'll see a swagger about the Irish you might not recognize. They're not back yet, but they're on their way. Don't miss the forest for the trees.

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# Irish running backs step up



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Senior safety Zeke Motta makes one of his four tackles on a Navy ball carrier. The Irish defense forced four turnovers and held the Midshipmen to only 149 rushing yards on 40 carries.

By **ANDREW OWENS**  
Assistant Managing Editor

DUBLIN — In the absence of 1,000-yard rusher Cierre Wood to suspension, Notre Dame relied on a running back who started at receiver the past two seasons and a sophomore whose only extensive experience is on kickoff returns.

The result was a 50-10 Irish win, achieved by Notre Dame dominating Navy at what the Midshipmen do best: running the football.

Starting running back Theo Riddick—who dabbled at running back as a freshman before moving to the slot position in 2010 and 2011—has returned to the position at which he feels most comfortable and, in Week One, the results were dazzling.

His 108 yards and two touchdowns on 19 carries, coupled with sophomore George Atkinson's 99 yards and two touchdowns on nine carries, powered the Irish offense and relieved the load on first-time starter Everett Golson's shoulders.

Riddick and Atkinson have created a muddled situation atop the depth chart—a good problem for Irish coach Brian Kelly to have. While Riddick won't be confused as a power back a la Jonas Gray or Robert Hughes, his contributions in the short-yardage game were paramount in the Irish win.

"It keeps me motivated and brings that 'want to' in terms of wanting to get another touchdown," Riddick said. "We were very confident today. We knew what we

had to do. We came in with a great, great gameplan."

Atkinson's 56-yard first-quarter touchdown jaunt displayed some of the electricity that allowed him to make an impact on special teams during his freshman season in 2011.

So much for first-game jitters. "I was excited," Atkinson said. "You don't want to come in thinking about negative things, you want to think about how you can be successful."

With he and Riddick serving as the team's thunder and lightning in Wood's absence, what role does that provide for Wood and injured running back Amir Carlisle in the Irish attack?

"I don't know, we're going to see though," Atkinson said. "I can't wait when all of us are on the field together."

With Wood watching the game on television from South Bend and Riddick confounding the Midshipmen defense, Kelly said future starting decisions will be made based on future production.

"Everybody has an opportunity to contribute. Those are teammates that we respect and we'll count on them as we move forward," said Kelly regarding the four players suspended for the season opener, including Wood. "What their roles are will be defined as we move through the season. They're valuable members of our football team and we respect that everybody's got to earn their spot on the field."

Riddick said the jumbled

running back situation motivates him to reach another level, as he said the rushing attack has room for improvement.

"We didn't have the best game in terms of running, but we just have to improve week in and week out," he said.

When Atkinson reached the end zone for the first time as a running back, he didn't perform a special stunt or celebration in the end zone. He simply placed the ball on the ground and ran to the sidelines.

"I watch a lot of guys in the NFL," he said. "I like to see big runners get broken in. I saw Chris Johnson do it. I watch a lot of highlight tapes ... and I just try to imitate [some of] the pros."

Atkinson fell just a yard short of giving the Irish a pair of 100-yard rushers in the victory, but he wasn't aware of that fact until postgame interviews.

"I didn't know. Numbers don't matter to me as long as we get the victory," he said.

Riddick said he expects the Irish to run a balanced offense onto the field each week, with each lifting the other

"We can stretch it out and we can run," Riddick said. "I think [Saturday was] a real coming out for our team. Usually we struggled in the first game in previous years. Today we did very well." But with Wood and Carlisle's return on the horizon, it might just be the tip of the iceberg.

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# Golson, Kelly extend streak

By **ALLAN JOSEPH**  
Editor-in-Chief

DUBLIN — Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson made his first start Sunday, completing 12 of 18 passes for 144 yards, one touchdown and one interception. In the win, Golson extended an impressive streak for Irish coach Brian Kelly: In each of his last six games with a new starter under center, Kelly has emerged a winner. The last quarterback to win his first start under Kelly was junior quarterback Tommy Rees, who started in Notre Dame's 28-3 Senior Day victory over No. 15 Utah in 2010. Before Rees, Dayne Crist won his first start in that same season, leading the Irish to victory over

Purdue in the 2010 season opener.

### Opener holds many firsts

Senior linebacker Manti Te'o recorded two "firsts" in Saturday's contest. Te'o recovered a fumble for the first time in the second quarter, and after halftime recorded his first interception.

Twenty-one players made their first appearance in a Notre Dame uniform Saturday, including 14 in the first quarter. Golson was among those making their first career appearance.

Senior receiver Robby Toma scored the first rushing touchdown of his career on a nine-yard scamper with just 39 seconds left in the contest.

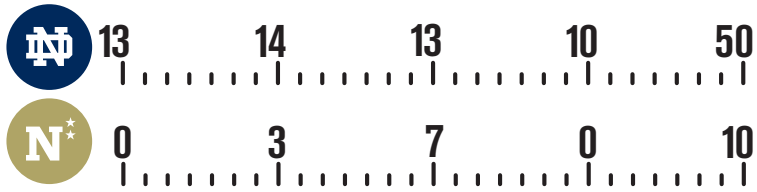
### Offensive reversals

In 2010, Notre Dame gave up 367 rushing yards to the Midshipmen, who normally outrush the Irish due to a rush-heavy triple-option attack. Navy recorded just 149 yards on the ground in Saturday's contest, its lowest total since the 2010 season. The Midshipmen did throw for 192 yards at 9.7 yards per attempt.

The Irish rolled up 293 yards on the ground, their biggest total since a 320-yard rushing output against Stanford in 2003. They added 192 yards through the air, normally their primary method of moving the ball.

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# SCORING SUMMARY



- 1

•NOTRE DAME 6, NAVY 0

Theo Riddick 11-yard run (Tausch kick failed)

🕒 9:12 remaining

Drive: 11 plays, 75 yards, 5:48 elapsed
- NOTRE DAME 13, NAVY 0

George Atkinson 56-yard run (Tausch kick good)

🕒 3:02 remaining

Drive: Four plays, 70 yards, 1:59 elapsed
- 2

•NOTRE DAME 20, NAVY 0

Tyler Eifert 5-yard pass from Everett Golson (Tausch kick good)

🕒 11:20 remaining

Drive: 10 plays, 80 yards, 3:32 elapsed

•NOTRE DAME 27, NAVY 0

Stephon Tuitt 77-yard fumble return (Tausch kick good)

🕒 2:12 remaining

•NOTRE DAME 27, NAVY 3

Nick Sloan 26-yard field goal

🕒 0:00 remaining

Drive: 10 plays, 74 yards, 2:12 elapsed

3

•NOTRE DAME 27, NAVY 10

Shawn Lynch 25-yard pass from Trey Miller (Sloan kick good)

🕒 14:03 remaining

Drive: Three plays, 75 yards, 0:57 elapsed

•NOTRE DAME 33, NAVY 10

George Atkinson 3-yard run (Turk rush failed)

🕒 8:45 remaining

Drive: 12 plays, 87 yards, 5:18 elapsed

•NOTRE DAME 40, NAVY 10

Theo Riddick 3-yard run (Tausch kick good)

🕒 4:06 remaining

Drive: 7 plays, 49 yards, 3:07 elapsed

4

•NOTRE DAME 43, NAVY 10

Nick Tausch 34-yard field goal

🕒 5:54 remaining

Drive: Seven plays, 42 yards, 3:53 elapsed

•NOTRE DAME 50, NAVY 10

Robby Toma 9-yard run (Tausch kick good)

🕒 0:39 remaining

Drive: 8 plays, 68 yards, 3:48 elapsed

# STATISTICS

PASSING			
Golson	12-18-144	Miller	14-19-192
Hendrix	4-5-53	Reynolds	0-1-0
RUSHING			
Riddick	19-107	Christian	2-39
Atkinson	9-99	Greene	3-33
McDaniel	9-59	Copeland	6-29
RECEIVING			
Eifert	4-22	Lynch	4-87
Daniels	2-49	Bolena	3-61
TACKLES			
Jackson	7	Gaines	12
Fox	7	Bush	8
Te'o	6	Ferguson	7





SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Senior linebacker Manti Te'o waits to congratulate his teammates following a Notre Dame touchdown. The preseason All-American recorded six tackles along with an interception and a fumble recovery, both were the first of his storied collegiate career.

## IRISH HOSPITALITY

*Notre Dame kicked off the 2012 campaign in unfamiliar territory, but the trans-Atlantic trip had no effect on the Irish. Notre Dame scored touchdowns on its first three drives to start the game, taking a 27-3 lead into the half. Theo Riddick and George Atkinson combined for 206 yards and four rushing TDs as the Irish cruised to a 50-10 victory before returning stateside.*



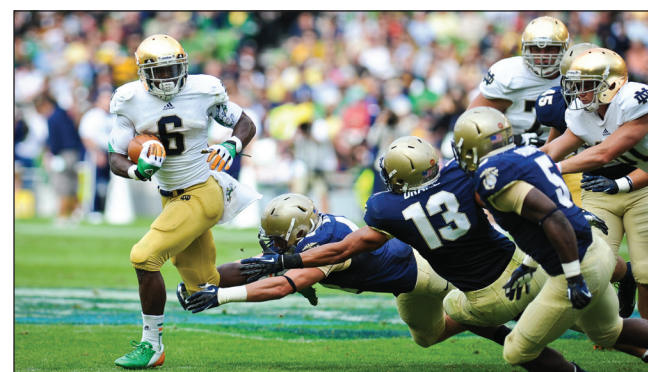
SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt returns a fumble 77 yards for a touchdown late in the second quarter.



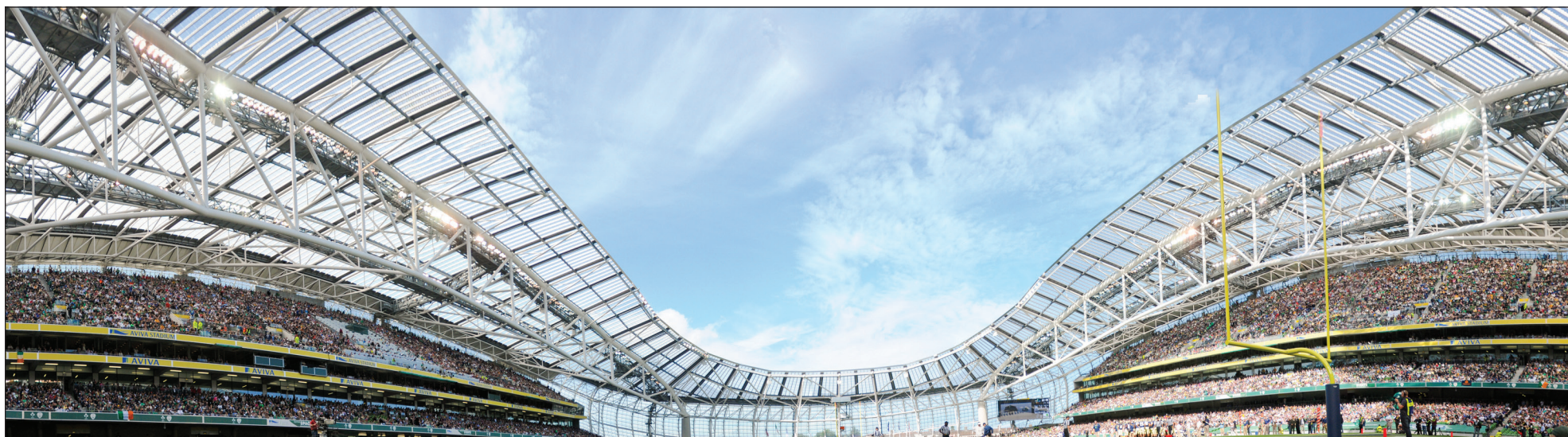
SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Senior running back Theo Riddick celebrates one of his two rushing touchdowns.



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Senior running back Theo Riddick evades three Navy defenders. The former slot receiver rushed for 107 yards.



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Notre Dame gathers during a timeout at a nearly sold-out Aviva Stadium in Dublin. The stadium holds 51,700 people and was constructed in 2010 on the famous site of Lansdowne Road for rugby and national team soccer.