

# IRISH INSIDER

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## Avoiding the trap

*Riddick has career day as Irish overcome early mistakes, improve to 7-0*

By **BRIAN HARTNETT**  
Sports Writer

In a matchup widely billed as a “trap game,” No. 5 Notre Dame survived a tough test from BYU on Saturday at Notre Dame Stadium, as the Irish utilized a strong second-half rushing attack to overpower the Cougars’ stout defense and rally for a 17-14 victory.

After sophomore running back George Atkinson put the Irish (7-0) ahead with a 2-yard touchdown run with 12:52 to go in the fourth quarter, BYU (4-4) marched down the field on a 13-play, 50-yard drive. But Cougars coach Bronco Mendenhall decided to punt from Notre Dame’s 34-yard line rather than attempt a game-tying field goal.

“Six minutes to go, thought we would have a great chance to make a stop,” Mendenhall said. “It was work and longer than what I had hoped for, and with six minutes and 35, really believed we would stop and get the ball back with better field position than what we did.”

BYU was unable to make a stop, as the Irish iced the game with a 9-play, 48-yard drive consisting entirely of running plays.

“We expected to run the football and we had talked about it on the preceding drive and this was — we were going to make them use their timeouts,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said of the drive.

Notre Dame’s final offensive possession reflected the team’s second-half strategy, which was heavily run-based. The Irish attempted only three passes in the second half.

“It was pretty clear that we were going to be able to control both sides of the ball on the offensive line and defensive line,” Kelly said. “And you know, really stuck with our game plan. Came in here wanting to run the football. Thought we controlled that quite well.”

Notre Dame ran for 270 yards on the nation’s third-ranked rushing defense coming into the game. Senior running back Theo Riddick ran for a career-high 143 yards on 15 carries, while fellow senior Cierre Wood ran for 114 yards on 18 carries. Atkinson, the other member in Notre Dame’s trio of running backs, had only five carries but took one of them in for the eventual winning touchdown.

“At the end of the day, it starts



EILEEN VEIHMEYER | The Observer

**Junior quarterback Tommy Rees hands the ball off the senior running back Theo Riddick during Notre Dame’s 17-14 win over BYU on Saturday. Riddick ran for a career-high 143 yards.**

and ends with our offensive line,” Wood said. “They were getting the push up front and it’s our job to play off of them and read off of them. We just got the job done as a unit.”

Junior quarterback Tommy Rees started in place of injured sophomore quarterback Everett Golson for the Irish. Golson, who suffered a concussion against Stanford, had been cleared to practice Wednesday, but Kelly said there were no circumstances under which Golson would have played.

“[Golson] wanted to play,” Kelly said. “He made his case. I just felt like where we were during and my evaluation of him cumulatively, I felt like this was the best thing to do... We feel like we’ve got a kid now that’s 100 percent ready to go for Oklahoma.”

Rees started the game by completing six of his first seven passes, four of them to senior tight end Tyler Eifert. The duo connected on a 4-yard touchdown pass with 1:30 left in the first quarter to put the Irish on the board.

“I think [Eifert] provides a mismatch out there on offense,” Rees said. “He’s a great player,

he can run, he’s got a lot of size, and I think he does a good job of getting open and finding a way to come down with the ball.”

Notre Dame’s defense allowed its first touchdown in 17 quarters when BYU senior quarterback Riley Nelson found junior receiver Cody Hoffman wide-open in the back of the end zone with 8:25 to go in the second quarter.

The Irish defense then surrendered another touchdown less than three minutes later. After a Rees pass bounced off sophomore receiver DaVaris Daniels and into the hands of Cougars junior linebacker Kyle Van Noy, Nelson hit junior tight end Kaneakua Friel on a 2-yard touchdown pass, putting the Cougars up 14-7.

“We weren’t used to [giving up touchdowns],” Irish senior linebacker Manti Te’o said.

It made me mad, and it made a lot of guys mad and when they scored again, it really made us mad.”

Notre Dame committed several costly penalties in a sloppy first half, including personal fouls on sophomore tight end Troy Niklas and sophomore safety Matthias Farley.

in the quarter. The highlight of the drive was a 55-yard run by Riddick, in which the senior was hit at the line of scrimmage but regained his balance to move the Irish downfield.

Notre Dame’s defense held BYU scoreless in the second half and limited the Cougars to 243 yards overall.

“A lot of us were anxious and excited and we weren’t playing our brand of football,” Te’o said. “We came in at half time and settled down and the result is the whole team just playing our brand of football.”

Te’o spurred the Irish defense, recording 10 tackles and one interception. Graduate student defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore and sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt pressured the Cougars offense throughout the game, as the pair combined for 10 tackles and 2.5 sacks.

“It was a hard-fought win,” Lewis-Moore said. “We are a team that holds ourselves to a higher standard. We have to play at a higher standard. We got the win but a lot of guys were like ‘We could play a lot better.’”

Kelly echoed Lewis-Moore’s sentiments, noting the team’s subdued reaction to the victory.

“I think the thing that was concerning for me the most is when our guys came in, and I didn’t sense a great feeling after winning a tough, tough football game,” Kelly said. “And that’s a team that won ten games last year. That’s a bracket buster team in basketball parlance, that’s a darned good football team.”

Notre Dame will look to improve to 8-0 for the first time since 2002 when it travels to Norman, Okla., on Saturday to face No. 8 Oklahoma at 8 p.m.

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## PLAYER OF THE GAME

**THEO RIDDICK**  
NOTRE DAME RUNNING BACK

Riddick rebounded from a 45-yard effort against Stanford to pile up a career-high 143 yards on 15 carries in the win over BYU. The senior ripped off a key 55-yard run on a third-and-1 in the third quarter after he appeared to be stopped at the line of scrimmage. Riddick’s 9.5 yards per carry helped the Irish control the second half.

# REPORT CARD

## C+ QUARTERBACKS

The quarterbacks weren't asked to do much in place of Everett Golson. Tommy Rees connected on six of his first seven passes but then hit a cold spell from there. Andrew Hendrix made a nice cameo appearance.

## A RUNNING BACKS

The Irish backs had another great game as Theo Riddick and Cierre Wood both topped the century mark. Riddick ran for a career high while George Atkinson also added a key touchdown in the fourth quarter.

## B- RECEIVERS

Tyler Eifert continues to return to form, this time with four catches for 73 yards and a touchdown, although all of it was in the first quarter. The receivers did not have a lot of opportunities but DaVaris Daniels' drop caused an interception that led to a Cougar touchdown.

## A- OFFENSIVE LINE

The big guys up front turned in another solid performance, paving the way for more than 250 yards on the ground. The unit allowed just one sack and one quarterback hurry in controlling the line of scrimmage.

## A- DEFENSIVE LINE

Stephon Tuitt and Kapron Lewis-Moore combined for 2.5 sacks as the defensive line repeatedly hurried Riley Nelson. The group did allow, however, Nelson to scramble effectively but held the Cougars to just 66 rushing yards.

## A LINEBACKERS

Manti Te'o just keeps in coming, this time in a 10-tackle, one-interception effort. Prince Shembo, Danny Spond and Carlo Calabrese all had five or more tackles while Dan Fox added a sack. Spond's interception on BYU's final possession sealed the game for the Irish.

## B DEFENSIVE BACKS

While 177 passing yards is an admirable figure, broken coverages cost Notre Dame a touchdown and could have cost them a second one. Matthias Farley's personal foul also helped a BYU scoring drive.

## C- SPECIAL TEAMS

Kyle Brindza had been solid all year for the Irish but missed two field goals inside 40 yards. Davonte' Neal lost three yards on punt returns and George Atkinson averaged just 18.5 yards per kick return.

## B+ COACHING

After a slow start, the Irish again made effective half-time adjustments, holding the Cougars scoreless in the second half while running the ball at will.

## OVERALL GPA: 3.26

The Irish have discovered the formula for winning — running the ball and playing strong defense. Notre Dame manhandled the Cougars in the second half on both sides of the ball and now has its longest winning streak since 2006. The Irish will put their perfect record on the line when the travel to Oklahoma for a showdown with the Sooners.

# PLAY OF THE GAME

## RIDDICK BREAKS THROUGH FOR 55 YARDS ON THIRD DOWN

On third down midway through the third quarter, Riddick took a handoff from Rees and appeared to be tripped up in the backfield. The senior was somehow able to maintain his balance and gained 55 yards before he was caught from behind at the 8-yard line.



EILEEN VEIHMEYER | The Observer

Sophomore running back George Atkinson, left, celebrates his fourth quarter touchdown with teammates during Notre Dame's 17-14 win over BYU on Saturday.

# Notre Dame finds offensive identity in win



**Matthew DeFranks**  
Associate Sports Editor

It was not pretty, flashy, sparkly or fancy — but it was who the Irish are.

Without its starting quarterback, No. 5 Notre Dame was able to pull out a 17-14 win over BYU using what has now become this team's offensive identity — rushing the football.

Just two weeks after Notre Dame dominated Miami to the tune of 376 rushing yards, the Irish powered through, around and over a run defense that came into the contest ranked third in the country. Senior running backs Theo Riddick and Cierre Wood racked up 143 and 114 yards, respectively, repeatedly grinding out tough yards between the tackles.

The effort on the ground was the third time the Irish ran for over 200 yards in a game this season alone. The previous two came against overmatched Navy and Miami but this one was different.

This one came against a good defense. This one had big runs and clutch gainers. This one put the game away in the fourth quarter.

After trailing at halftime for the second consecutive game,

Notre Dame pounded the rock 24 times in the final two quarters while attempting only three passes. With the game on the line and the Irish protecting a precious three-point lead, Irish coach Brian Kelly went to the running backs to put the game on ice.

"We are becoming that kind of football team on offense," Kelly said. "Even when we were down, we kept running the football.

"It's our identity and what we do."

And that's exactly what they should be doing. Kelly and the Irish are 18-2 in the last three seasons when they outrush their opponent. They have won 11 straight games when they gain 200 or more yards.

The correlation is clear between running the football and winning. The Irish have too many weapons in the backfield to let them take a backseat to the revolving door under center.

The running backs have been so good that it barely even matters who is under center. As long as the quarterback — whether it be junior Tommy Rees or sophomore Everett Golson — can hold on to the football, the signal caller does not need to be a world beater. If they can just complete a key third down every

now and then and make the defense at least respect their ability, that should be enough for Notre Dame.

The Irish rushing attack can do the rest, including finishing the game.

"We've been able to run the ball in the second half and we proved it today and we have some talent back there," Riddick said. "Why not give us the ball?"

And there is, of course, the Irish defense.

The Irish defense has transformed from being one that allowed 35 points to Navy in 2010 to one that is the smash mouth backbone to a 7-0 start. The Notre Dame defense has kept the Irish in games no matter how much the offense struggled.

The offense has not been asked to mount miraculous comebacks. They have not had to get into a shootout. They have had the luxury of running the ball because the defense kept them in the game.

That's not going to change — and neither should Notre Dame's identity.

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

# Ground game carries Irish past stingy BYU



EILEEN VEIHMEYER | The Observer

Senior running back Cierre Wood looks for running room during Notre Dame's 17-14 win over BYU on Saturday. Wood racked up 114 yards and helped the Irish gain 270 yards on the ground.

By **CORY BERNARD**  
Sports Writer

Notre Dame's starting quarterback was sidelined. BYU's run defense was ranked third in the country, allowing only 68 yards per game. The odds seemed stacked against the Irish offense Saturday.

No one told senior running backs Theo Riddick and Cierre Wood.

Riddick rumbled for 143 physical yards — more than BYU had given up in a game all season — while his housemate Wood added 114 yards of his own.

The 5-foot-11, 200-pound Riddick shed would-be Cougar tacklers all day Saturday, most notably on a 55-yard scamper in the second half. Initially bottled-up at the line of scrimmage, he emerged upright from the scrum and dashed down the sidelines before being caught.

"I mean, [Riddick] has run really hard and physical for us," Irish coach Brian Kelly said. "He's been that — last year, we had [running back] Jonas Gray, who was that big physical back. Now I'm not comparing him to

Jonas, because he's not; he's half his size. But running up between the tackles ... it gives an energy to the entire team when you see backs running that physical. And those linemen, they want to start blocking for you."

Riddick said he learned some of the nuances of running back from the now-graduated Gray.

"You have to go north and south," he said. "Once you put your foot in the ground, you can't dance too much, that's when you allow the other defenders to catch up."

The Irish entered the locker room at halftime trailing 14-7, but emerged with a renewed focus. Notre Dame only threw the ball three times in the second half, instead opting to lean on its ground game. Wood said he and his offensive peers have always been confident in the rushing attack.

"Basically, if we had to play the whole game without throwing a pass we would still win," Wood said. "That's what I think; that's what all of us think as a core, as a unit. Run the ball, simple as that."

Despite trailing in the second half, Kelly noted the

importance of continuing to pursue a strong rushing attack.

"Well, we just felt like that we matched up well; that they play a lot of different coverages, and you know, if they are going to play a lot of two deep zone, we always philosophically like to go in thinking about running the football first," Kelly said. "And then, that's who we are. We are becoming that kind of football team on offense. You talk about finding an identity; that's why we talk with it. Even when we were down, we kept running the football."

Wood may have done serious damage to the BYU defense, but he didn't shy away from teasing his backfield partner after the game.

"Theodore, how did it feel when you ran down the sideline on that 55-yard scamper, you got hawked from behind?" Wood said to Riddick.

"I was disappointed. I got gassed a little bit but, hey, we won, right?" Riddick responded.

Thanks to the running game, yes, the Irish won.

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## Touchdown streak ends

By **CORY BERNARD**  
Sports Writer

The Irish had not allowed an offensive touchdown in 17 quarters prior to surrendering two on consecutive drives to BYU in the second quarter. Notre Dame had not accomplished such a feat since Dan Devine's final season in 1980, when the Irish defense set a school record by preventing an offensive touchdown for 23 consecutive quarters.

Notre Dame has allowed two or fewer offensive touchdowns in 19 of its past 24 games. In 11 of 19, Irish opponents score either one touchdown or no

touchdowns.

Despite allowing BYU to score twice Saturday, Notre Dame is still the only team in the Football Bowl Subdivision that has yet to yield a rushing touchdown. The Irish have given up nine rushing touchdowns over their past 25 games. Only Alabama has allowed fewer rushing touchdowns over that span.

### Te'o leads the way again

Senior linebacker Manti Te'o intercepted his fourth pass of the season to go along with his team-leading 10 tackles Saturday. The interception marked the Irish defense's 16th

takeaway of the season. Junior linebacker Danny Spond recorded the team's 17th takeaway with an interception on BYU's final possession.

Notre Dame only forced 14 turnovers during the entire 2011 season.

Te'o's interception also marked a personal milestone. He now sits one pick shy of tying the school record for most interceptions by a linebacker in a season. John Perguine intercepted five passes in 1966, and Lyron Cobbins equaled that total in 1995.

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## SCORING SUMMARY

	1 <sup>ST</sup>	2 <sup>ND</sup>	3 <sup>RD</sup>	4 <sup>TH</sup>	TOTAL
	0	14	0	0	14
	7	0	3	7	17

### 1 NOTRE DAME 7, BYU 0

Tyler Eifert 4-yard pass from Tommy Rees (Brindza kick)

1:30 remaining

Drive: 5 plays, 64 yards, 2:34 elapsed

### 2 NOTRE DAME 7, BYU 7

Cody Hoffman 6-yard pass from Riley Nelson (Sorensen kick)

8:25 remaining

Drive: 8 plays, 56 yards, 3:34 elapsed

### BYU 14, NOTRE DAME 7

Kaneakua Friel 2-yard pass from Riley Nelson (Sorensen kick)

1:21 remaining

Drive: 4 plays, 30 yards, 1:28 elapsed

### 3 BYU 14, NOTRE DAME 10

Kyle Brindza 24-yard field goal

2:25 remaining

Drive: 7 plays, 65 yards, 4:06 elapsed

### 4 NOTRE DAME 17, BYU 10

George Atkinson 2-yard run (Brindza kick)

12:52 remaining

Drive: 8 plays, 72 yards, 3:34 elapsed

## STATISTICS



**PASSING**

Nelson	23-36-2	Rees	7-16-1
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**RUSHING**

Williams	14-64	Riddick	15-143
Pritchard	3-9	Wood	18-114
Nelson	8-(-7)	Hendrix	1-14

**RECEIVING**

Hoffman	8-86	Eifert	4-73
Williams	7-42	Jones	2-40
Apo	3-25	Atkinson	1-4

**TACKLES**

Sorensen	10	Te'o	10
Ogletree	7	Russell	6
Hadley	6	Farley	6
Ansah	6	Shembo	6
Johnson	5	Spond	5
Sampson	5	Calabrese	5
Hadley	4	Lewis-Moore	5
Kaveinga	4	Tuitt	4
Van Noy	4	Nix	4

**INTERCEPTIONS**

Van Noy	1	Te'o	1
		Spond	1

**SACKS**

Kaufusi	1	Tuitt	1.5
		Lewis-Moore	1
		Fox	1
		Calabrese	0.5



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Sophomore running back George Atkinson dives into the endzone for a 2-yard touchdown run early in the fourth quarter. The score was Atkinson's team-leading fourth of the season and ended up being the decisive score in Notre Dame's 17-14 win over BYU on Saturday at Notre Dame Stadium.

## FINDING A WAY TO WIN

The Irish rushed for 270 yards, nearly four times the amount BYU gave up per game, and pushed the Cougars around on their way to a 17-14 victory. Notre Dame overcame early mistakes and penalties to come from behind in the second half for the second game in a row. The Irish now carry an undefeated record and top-five ranking into a game at No. 8 Oklahoma on Saturday.



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Junior quarterback Andrew Hendrix gains 14 yards on his first carry since the season opener against Navy.



EILEEN VEIHMEYER | The Observer

Sophomore tight end Troy Niklas is upended by a BYU defender during the 17-14 win.



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Junior Louis Nix, left, and sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt fight off blocks from BYU offensive linemen.



OE KENESEY | The Observer

Senior tight end Tyler Eifert leaps for a catch in the first quarter of Notre Dame's win Saturday. Eifert finished the game with four catches for 73 yards and a touchdown.



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Junior linebacker Danny Spond celebrates his fourth-quarter interception that sealed Notre Dame's victory Saturday. It was Spond's first career interception.