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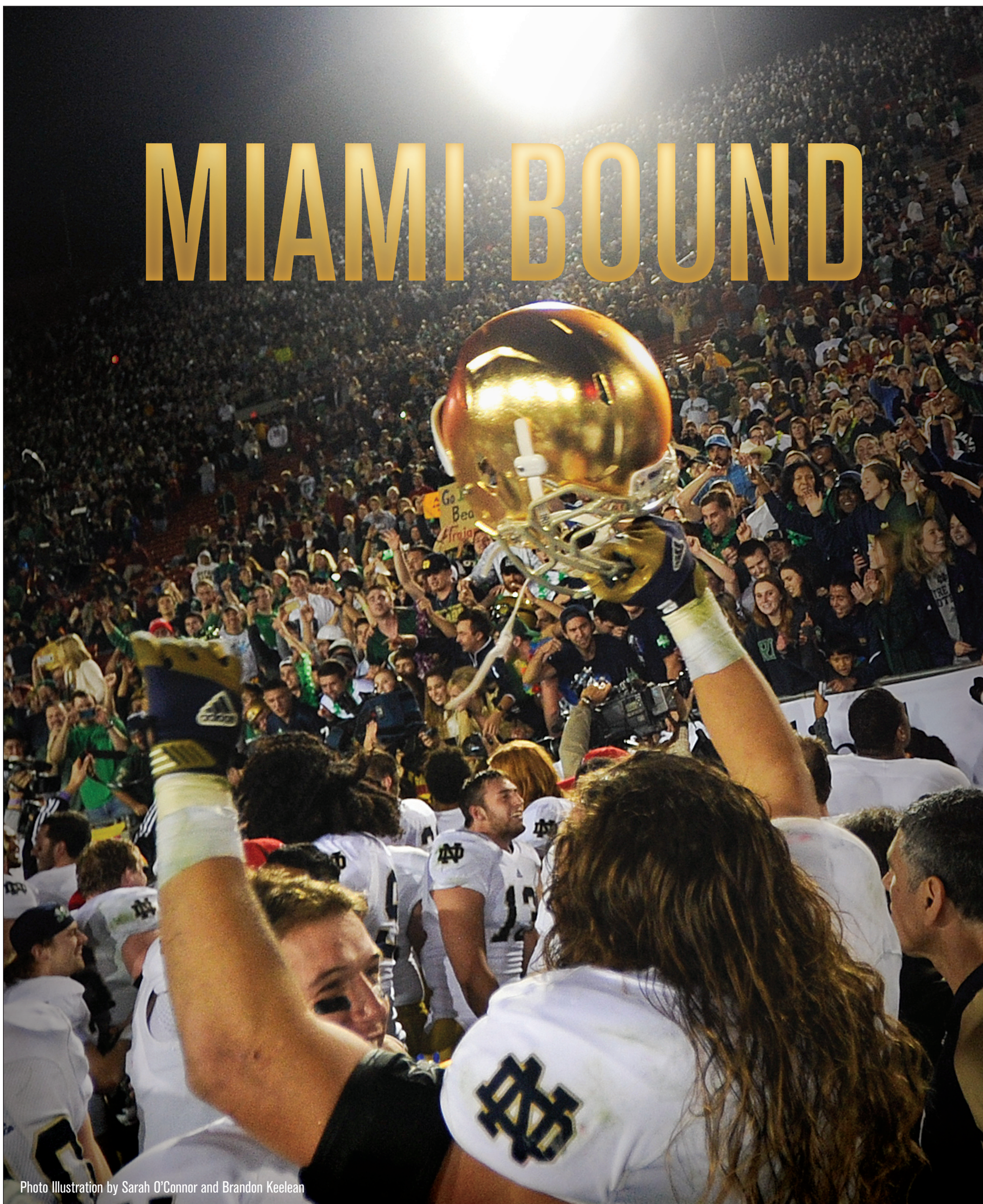


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SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Irish coach Brian Kelly speaks with ESPN reporter Heather Cox after Notre Dame's 22-13 win over USC. Kelly guided Notre Dame to an undefeated regular season in his third season at the helm of the Irish program after going 8-5 his previous two seasons.

Swarbrick and Kelly carrying out a grand vision for Notre Dame



Allan Joseph
Editor-in-Chief

LOS ANGELES — As the final seconds ticked off the clock Saturday night, Director of Athletics Jack Swarbrick made celebratory rounds on the Notre Dame sideline, embracing sweaty Irish players while wearing a sharp grey suit. As he moved from player to player, he wore an ear-to-ear grin, and with good reason: Swarbrick's most prominent employee had never looked like a better hire.

Before the season, Swarbrick said Irish coach Brian Kelly was on the "coolest seat in America" after two consecutive five-loss campaigns. Many fans scoffed at Swarbrick's seeming overconfidence — as much as the program had improved in two years, it also seemed to be in a state of flux.

Chuck Martin, a safeties coach for two seasons, had risen the ranks to lead an inconsistent Irish offense. The quarterback position was mad-deningly unsettled, and after moving Theo Riddick to receiver right after they arrived, Kelly and Martin asked him to move back to running back two years later. The defensive front had lost what seemed to be its best player to South Florida, and the secondary appeared vulnerable at best.

It didn't help that the previous season's turnover-prone offense fell short of its talented potential — yet after truly ugly wins over far-inferior teams (see: at Pittsburgh), Kelly was just happy his team was developing a "winning instinct." The Irish

struggled mightily at times, but he seemed to forgive all after a win.

Through it all, Kelly stuck with his quiet confidence. He brushed off concerns about his sideline demeanor and player management while insisting his program was on track. He deflected questions challenging his decisions with his usual polished ease, but there appeared to be an undercurrent to his answers.

"I've got this," he seemed to want to say. "Just wait and see."

Then, of course, came the 2012

The Irish should be competing for BCS bowl berths for years to come.

quarterback controversy. There were tortured baseball references, but it just looked like indecision at the most important position on the field. But the Irish kept winning, and Kelly kept forging ahead with his plan.

Fast-forward to the end of the season. The Notre Dame offense has found its stride, led by the two players whose management had seemed most confusing. Everett Golson plays with aplomb more befitting a third-year starter than a sophomore who had been benched twice, while Theo Riddick earns the Irish the toughest yards when they need them most. The Irish defense looks better than it ever had, shutting down explosive offenses like Oklahoma and USC and reducing Aaron Lynch to a mere afterthought. And most importantly, the coach

who insisted developing a nebulous "winning instinct" mattered above all has shown us what he meant: Against Purdue, Michigan, Stanford, BYU, Oklahoma and in legendary fashion, Pittsburgh, his Irish found a way to win time and time again. Twelve times, to be exact.

Now, Kelly has led an admittedly imperfect team to a perfect regular season. His vision has come together in a way only he could have foreseen, and he's one game away from adding a new banner to the Notre Dame Stadium tunnel.

But Kelly is no Gene Chizik-style one-hit wonder. Perhaps the truly amazing part of this transformation is how much Notre Dame will improve in the next few years. Golson will become a feared offensive weapon, the special teams have all the room in the world to improve and the incoming recruiting classes herald an era of unprecedented talent on the Notre Dame sideline. The Irish should be competing for BCS bowl berths for years to come.

Swarbrick's were not the only eyes smiling Saturday night — Irish eyes around the country were smiling too. And they had every right to be: They had all just glimpsed the reason Kelly had been hired in the first place: His vision was grander than anyone could have seen coming.

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Undefeated

Riddick's rushing, late goal-line stand close out 12-0 regular season with win over USC

By **ANDREW OWENS**
Assistant Managing Editor

LOS ANGELES — After the final seconds of a perfect regular season vanished and the Irish celebrated at midfield, Brian Kelly put his arm around his daughter and paced toward the tunnel. On his way to the jubilant locker room, he looked toward the Notre Dame fan contingent on the south side of the Los Angeles Coliseum and lifted his index finger.

No. 1 Notre Dame had risen to the task for the 12th time this season, and now a championship berth in Miami awaits the undefeated Irish following a 22-13 defeat of archrival USC (7-5).

"It was as you would've expected," Kelly said of the post-game scene in the locker room. "There was a lot of singing, dancing. It was what you would expect it to be for a team that's this close and has won so many games in that fashion. It was fun to be in there."

With the conquest of the Trojans, the Irish will play the winner of Saturday's SEC championship game between No. 2 Alabama and No. 3 Georgia in Atlanta. A win would secure Notre Dame's first national championship since 1988, with the current 24-year drought serving as the longest in program history since the Irish won their first in 1924.

Director of Athletics Jack Swarbrick, who hired Kelly nearly 36 months ago, had one word for the feeling as he celebrated with players on the field. "Phenomenal."

The Irish held their opponent to fewer than 20 points for the 11th time this season, and the final instance might have been the most impressive, even with USC quarterback Matt Barkley watching from the sidelines with a shoulder injury. Outside of a 53-yard reception by sophomore Marqise Lee, the Notre Dame secondary largely held the receiver and his talented teammate, Robert Woods, in check.

"I think Notre Dame showed me they have phenomenal senior leadership," embattled USC coach Lane Kiffin said. "You can see those guys understand the game and they really play well together. They're really physical and pretty old school — that's why they have so many close scores — but they don't screw up. You have to play really well to beat them. They don't hand you things."

Leading by nine points with a little more than five minutes remaining, Notre Dame's defense buckled down and held USC out of the end zone with another iconic goal-line stand. The Irish took over on downs with 2:33 remaining after a dropped pass by fullback Soma Vainuku, a symbol of how the archrivals' fortunes have changed since



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza celebrates with teammates after one of his five field goals in Notre Dame's 22-13 win over USC on Saturday. The Irish improved to 12-0 with the win and assured themselves of a berth in the BCS National Championship Game in Miami on Jan. 7.

last season's 31-17 USC victory at Notre Dame Stadium.

"If you followed us at all this year, that was how we play," Kelly said. "We come up big defensively at sometime during the game. We did that again. Unbelievable goal-line stand to hold any program, any team ... to get inside your two and come up with a great goal-line stand."

Notre Dame's offense out-gained USC 439 yards to 281 and more than doubled the Trojans' rushing output. Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson and senior running back Theo Riddick fueled the Irish offense, with the former once again showing no nerves on the road and the latter breaking countless tackles to secure precious yardage and field position.

Golson completed 15 of 26 passes for 217 yards and added another 47 rushing yards as he improved to 10-0 in his first season as a starter.

"He's making better decisions with the football," Kelly said. "I guess the difference is he's not careless with the football. Careless I can't take. He's going to make some bad decisions every once in a while, but he's not careless with the football."

"We couldn't win the game if we were going to control the game [in a conservative] fashion. I felt all week that you can't come in here hoping that USC doesn't play well. You've got to come in here and take it from them. Our gameplan was to let [Golson] play."

Golson engineered scoring drives on Notre Dame's first three possessions, as the Irish jumped out to a 13-7 lead midway through the second quarter.

As has been the case during much of the season, Notre Dame stalled inside the red zone, one of the points Kelly said he needs to address during the six weeks and two days leading up to the BCS National Championship Game on Jan. 7.

"It means there's things we still need to work on," said Kelly of an offense that scored just one touchdown in six red-zone appearances. "We're not a perfect team. We know that. Here's what we like: We know that's going to get better as our quarterback matures."

But sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza converted five of six attempted field goals, the longest of which he booted from 52 yards out as the first half expired, giving the Irish a 16-10 halftime lead.

"I know [Kelly] has confidence in me and it's a great thing to have from a coach, rather than having a coach trying to rip your head off," Brindza said. "He's a great guy and is able to go up to everyone, even if they made a mistake and be able to talk to them about what you did wrong and what you did right and be able to instill the confidence that you're going to go out there the next time and do the right thing."

Brindza contributed with

a key special teams tackle as well. Lee, a Heisman candidate, found a seam in the Irish kick-off coverage with the Irish up 22-13 with 5:58 remaining in the game, but it was the Notre Dame kicker who forced the speedster out of bounds at the Trojan 45.

"That was one of my nightmares all week," said Brindza on being the last man between Lee and the end zone. "It was a nightmare and when Lee was running up, I was a deer in the headlights. It was like a nightmare coming back to me, but then I turned it off and I realized I had to make the tackle and I was glad I was able to help my team."

After the ensuing goal-line stand and the game's conclusion minutes later, senior linebacker Manti Te'o, who recorded his seventh interception of the season in the third quarter, found his coach in the tunnel and had a simple message

for him.

"I said, 'I love you.' I love him," Te'o said. "[Our relationship] was bumpy at first, but it's great [now]. I'm happy to be part of this and have him as our coach. He's the best coach in college football."

Te'o said the Irish reached a goal with the 12-0 regular-season finish, but that there's one remaining chapter in the 2012 book yet to be written.

"We've brought a lot of pride back to Notre Dame," he said. "I'm grateful to be a part of it."

"We're the best team. We're No. 1."

Notre Dame will have the opportunity to finish as the best team and win 13 games for the first time in program history at the BCS National Championship Game on Jan. 7 against either No. 2 Alabama or No. 3 Georgia.

Contact Andrew Owens at aowens2@nd.edu

PLAYER OF THE GAME

THEO RIDDICK
NOTRE DAME RUNNING BACK

Riddick had a career game and spurred Notre Dame to an undefeated season with 179 total yards. The converted wide receiver took 20 carries and fought for each of his 146 yards on the ground. His highlight-reel spin move set up the game's final score on a crucial drive in the fourth quarter.

REPORT CARD

A-

QUARTERBACKS

Everett Golson continued a remarkable run of play dating back to the win over Oklahoma. The sophomore made plays with his arm and legs, and most importantly protected the ball on the road to ensure the win.

A

RUNNING BACKS

It has been a group effort at running back all season, but under the brightest lights senior Theo Riddick shined even brighter as Notre Dame's offensive star. Riddick had 179 total yards and countless highlight-reel moves.

B

RECEIVERS

Another solid, if not spectacular, performance by the receivers. Robby Toma and Tyler Eifert showed remarkable concentration on bobbled balls down the field. Eifert finally had a defensive back knock a pass away from him on a jump ball in the end zone.

A-

OFFENSIVE LINE

It was a great effort in run blocking by the offensive line, particularly the stalwarts on the left side — Zack Martin and Chris Watt. Theo Riddick had room to run and make people miss thanks to the group's work.

B+

DEFENSIVE LINE

Though the duo of USC backs Silas Redd and Curtis McNeal got loose a few times, the unit had a solid day. Louis Nix was a force in goal-line situations and Kapron Lewis-Moore recorded one-and-a-half sacks in his final regular-season effort.

A-

LINEBACKERS

Manti Te'o returned to the stat sheet in the interception column with his incredible seventh pick on the year. Te'o and fellow inside linebacker Carlo Calabrese had a solid game tackling the shifty USC running backs and outside linebacker Prince Shembo recorded half a sack.

A-

DEFENSIVE BACKS

He had to interfere with the best receiver in college football — USC sophomore Marqise Lee — on multiple occasions, but freshman KeiVarae Russell had an interception and contained the star Lee and Robert Woods.

B+

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kyle Brindza had a career day, making five field goals despite a miss at a crucial time. Though the punt return game was again quiet, George Atkinson put together a big kick return in the fourth quarter.

A

COACHING

Brian Kelly has completed his transformation of the Notre Dame program from mediocre to elite. If he can win the BCS National Championship Game, he will become a legend.

OVERALL GPA: 3.60

The Irish played in their 12th game as they had in the previous 11 — as a team. Riddick paced the offense, Te'o and Russell paced the defense and Brindza shined on special teams. Kelly spoke in his first two seasons of a "winning instinct" he hoped to instill. The Irish clearly listened — they are 12-0 and headed to Miami.

PLAY OF THE GAME

WITTEK'S PASS TO VAINUKU DROPPED ON FOURTH DOWN

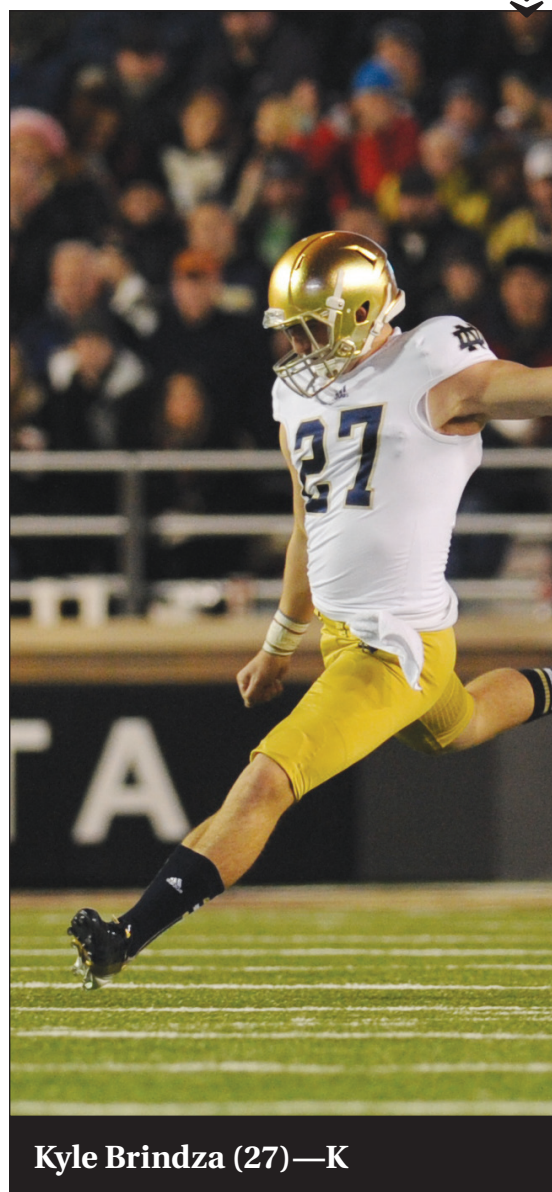
After stuffing three straight runs inside the 2-yard line in a valiant effort, the Irish defense completed yet another memorable goal-line stand as the fourth-down pass in the flat from USC quarterback Max Wittek to fullback Soma Vainuku was bobbled and dropped.

NOTRE DAME VS. USC

BY THE NUMBERS

Brindza's big day

Irish sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza had a career day Saturday with five made field goals. Brindza now has 23 converted field goals on the year — the highest single-season total in Notre Dame history. Brindza passed the mark of 21 set by long-time NFL kicker John Carney in 1986 with a 33-yard kick in the third quarter. Brindza's 31 attempts on the season are also the most in Notre Dame history, besting Carney's 28 in 1986. With his 52-yard field goal as time expired in the first half, Brindza tied ex-teammate David Ruffer for the second-longest field goal in school history. His kick was one yard short of the record of 53 yards set by Dave Reeve in 1976.



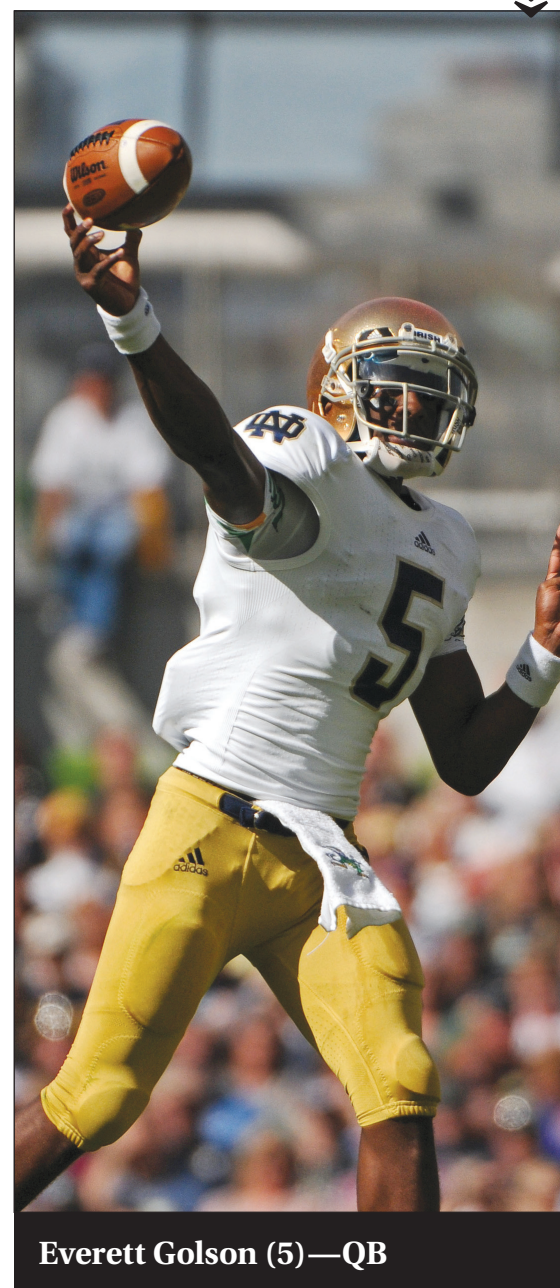
Kyle Brindza (27)—K



Brian Kelly—Irish Coach

Golson unbeaten as starter

Irish sophomore quarterback Everett Golson improved to 10-0 as a starter in Saturday's win over USC. His 10 consecutive victories to start his career are the second-most in Notre Dame history, trailing only Bob Williams' mark of 11 set from 1949-50. Golson attempted 26 passes without throwing an interception against the Trojans. He has not thrown an interception on the road since the season opener against Navy in Ireland, spanning games against Michigan State, Oklahoma, Boston College and USC.



Everett Golson (5)—QB

9

The Irish have allowed only nine points in the first quarter all season.

3

Only three Notre Dame have scored more than three touchdowns against USC all season (Purdue, B



By CHRIS ALLEN
Sports Editor

Lucky number 13

The Irish completed an undefeated regular season Saturday, defeating USC 22-13 to improve their record to 12-0. The undefeated run marks the 13th time in the 125 seasons of Notre Dame football that the Irish have finished the regular season unbeaten and untied. The last time Notre Dame went undefeated in the regular season was in 1988, posting an 11-0 mark under then-coach Lou Holtz. The Irish then followed that up with a 34-21 victory over West Virginia in the Fiesta Bowl to clinch the national championship.

« **Third time's the charm**

Irish coach Brian Kelly can become the latest in a growing list of Notre Dame coaches to win the national championship in their third season leading the Irish. Predecessors Frank Leahy, Ara Parseghian, Dan Devine and Lou Holtz all won a national championship in the third year of their respective tenures as coach. The undefeated regular season also continues a personal trend for Kelly, who led Cincinnati to a 12-0 season in 2009, his third year as head coach of the Bearcats. Kelly was hired at Notre Dame before Cincinnati competed in the Sugar Bowl to close that season.

Riddick leads the way

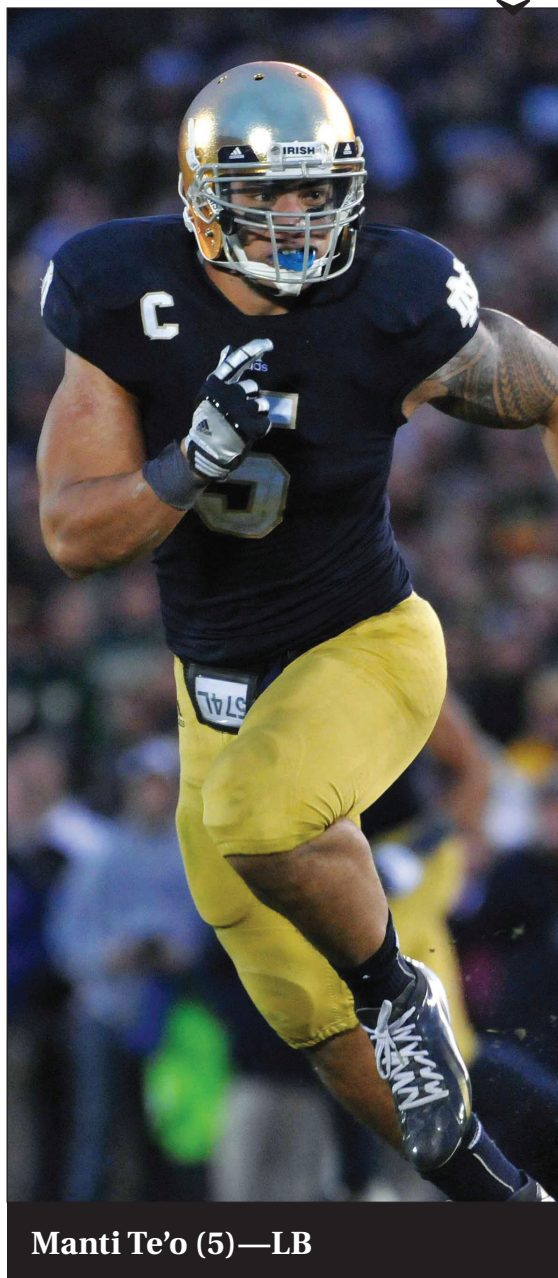
On the strength of senior running back Theo Riddick's 146 yards on the ground, Notre Dame rushed for 222 yards in its regular-season finale, compared to just 95 for the Trojans. Notre Dame is 43-2 in its last 45 games in which it gains more yards rushing than its opponent, with the only losses in that run coming against Michigan and Florida State during the 2011 season. The Irish have now recorded 200 rushing yards or more seven times in 12 games this season.

Te'o records 100 tackles — again

Senior linebacker and Heisman Trophy candidate Manti Te'o upped his season total in tackles to 103 with five against the Trojans. Te'o is the first Notre Dame player since Bob Crable during the 1979-81 seasons to record three straight seasons of 100 tackles. Te'o also intercepted Trojan quarterback Max Wittek for his seventh interception of the season. The mark is the highest for a Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) linebacker in 13 seasons. Te'o is second in FBS this season in interceptions, trailing only Fresno State safety Phillip Thomas.



Theo Riddick (6)—RB



Manti Te'o (5)—LB

...ne opponents
...an one offensive
...ne Irish defense
... (YU, Pittsburgh).

10.3

Notre Dame finishes the regular season with an average of 10.3 points allowed per game, a mark second only to Alabama's 9.3.

SCORING SUMMARY

	1 ST	2 ND	3 RD	4 TH	TOTAL
USC	0	10	0	3	13
ND	10	6	3	3	22

- 1 NOTRE DAME 3, USC 0**
Kyle Brindza 27-yard field goal
⌚ 11:25 remaining
Drive: 9 plays, 66 yards, 3:35 elapsed

NOTRE DAME 10, USC 0
Theo Riddick 9-yard run (Brindza kick)
⌚ 1:48 remaining
Drive: 12 plays, 87 yards, 6:57 elapsed
- 2 NOTRE DAME 10, USC 7**
Robert Woods 11-yard pass from Max Wittek (Heidari kick)
⌚ 14:55 remaining
Drive: 6 plays, 75 yards, 1:53 elapsed

NOTRE DAME 13, USC 7
Kyle Brindza 29-yard field goal
⌚ 9:19 remaining
Drive: 13 plays, 67 yards, 5:31 elapsed

NOTRE DAME 13, USC 10
Andre Heidari 39-yard field goal
⌚ 3:50 remaining
Drive: 9 plays, 54 yards, 5:24 elapsed

NOTRE DAME 16, USC 10
Kyle Brindza 52-yard field goal
⌚ 0:00 remaining
Drive: 9 plays, 48 yards, 1:25 elapsed
- 3 NOTRE DAME 19, USC 10**
Kyle Brindza 33-yard field goal
⌚ 0:31 remaining
Drive: 9 plays, 70 yards, 5:24 elapsed
- 4 NOTRE DAME 19, USC 13**
Andre Heidari 21-yard field goal
⌚ 9:20 remaining
Drive: 13 plays, 80 yards, 6:05 elapsed

NOTRE DAME 22, USC 13
Kyle Brindza 19-yard field goal
⌚ 5:58 remaining
Drive: 8 plays, 54 yards, 3:13 elapsed

STATISTICS

RUSHING YARDS	USC 95	ND 222
PASSING YARDS	USC 186	ND 217
Time of Possession	USC 25:22	ND 34:38
PASSING	Wittek 14-23-186	Golson 15-26-217
RUSHING	Redd 12-77	Riddick 20-146
	McNeal 9-38	Golson 9-47
	Lee 1-(-1)	Wood 8-20
RECEIVING	Woods 7-92	Eifert 4-69
	Lee 5-75	Jones 3-40
TACKLES	Pullard 13	Farley 9
	Dawson 10	Jackson 6
	McDonald 10	Motta 5
	Starling 8	Te'o 5
	Williams 8	Shembo 5

Defense records another goal-line stand

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

LOS ANGELES — Yet again, the game was on the line. Yet again, the opponents were at the goal line. Yet again, the Irish were defending a perfect season. And yet again, the Notre Dame defense came through.

“This was another clear indication of how we got to 12-0,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said. “Our guys have an incredible resolve regardless of the circumstances of coming up and finding ways to win. That’s all we talk about.”

No. 1 Notre Dame (12-0) had entered Saturday’s showdown at the Los Angeles Coliseum preparing for a pair of explosive receivers in USC’s Marqise Lee and Robert Woods. Yet through 54 minutes, the Irish had contained the USC passing attack, holding redshirt freshman quarterback Max Wittek to just 124 yards on 12-of-18 passing with two interceptions.

But facing a 22-13 deficit with 5:50 left at their own 45-yard line, the Trojans (7-5) came to life. Wittek found Lee down the left side of the field for a 53-yard completion to the 2-yard line, bringing the flow of USC fans leaving the stands to a loud and immediate halt.

With its back in the shadow of a

flaming Olympic torch on the stadium’s east end, the Notre Dame defense dug in and refused to yield a game-changing touchdown.

“To be honest with you, with us, as long as you put the ball down and there’s time on the clock, we’re going to battle,” graduate student defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore said. “We played hard, we got some pressure and we had 11 guys on the field believe.”

The Trojans immediately backed up five yards on a false-start penalty before running back Curtis McNeal pushed USC to the 4-yard line on first down.

On second down, Wittek lofted a pass toward Lee in the corner of the end zone, but freshman cornerback KeiVarae Russell committed pass interference and gave the sophomore receiver no chance at catching the ball — and then did the same thing on the same play call on the very next snap.

The penalties brought the Trojans to first and goal from the 1-yard line with 4:07 to go. With just three feet separating the Trojans from a two-point game, the situation was reminiscent of Notre Dame’s overtime win over Stanford six weeks ago — and the Irish defense knew it.

“It gives you confidence that we have done it before, that it can be achieved, that it’s possible,”

Lewis-Moore said. “Yeah, we’ve been here before, so that should give us a little more energy. We’ve done this before, so what’s the difference between then and now?”

There wasn’t much of one, as it turned out. Wittek plunged forward twice in an attempt to get the yards himself, but the Notre Dame defensive line held firm, anchored by junior nose tackle Louis Nix.

“He’s a hell of a player,” Lewis-Moore said. “He’s a big guy and he’s really active in the backfield.”

With precious seconds bleeding off the clock after two consecutive failed rushing plays, USC coach Lane Kiffin burned a timeout — and came out of it with a running play for McNeal. Irish safeties Matthias Farley and Zeke Motta crashed in from the edges and Nix blew through blockers in the middle to stuff McNeal yet again, bringing up 4th-and-goal.

“Whenever the ball is that close to the goal-line, we have to tighten up and that’s what we did,” senior linebacker Manti Te’o said.

On fourth down, Wittek found Soma Vainuku, but the fullback couldn’t hold on to the low pass and the ball bounced to the ground, giving the Irish another goal-line stand in a season full of memorable moments.

“We did it,” Lewis-Moore said.



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Irish sophomore safety Matthias Farley and junior nose guard Louis Nix combine to stop USC running back Curtis McNeal at the goal-line.

“We did it. It’s crazy, you know? No. 1 and keeping that No. 1 and being 12-0 and playing for a national championship, it’s something spectacular.”

“It’s awesome. You just put the ball down and if there’s time on the clock we’re going to battle. We’re not going to give up. This

team and this defense, we’ve got a lot of character. We’ve got a lot of guys that play hard, and they play with heart. As long as you put the ball down and they’re not in the end zone we’re going to fight.”

Contact Allan Joseph at ajoseph2@nd.edu

Riddick earns tough yards to lead offense



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Irish senior running back Theo Riddick makes a move in the open field after taking a handoff. Riddick paced the Irish offense with 179 total yards and scored Notre Dame’s only touchdown of the game in the first quarter.

By **CHRIS ALLEN**
Sports Editor

LOS ANGELES — With one win left to clinch a national championship berth and facing a hostile road environment against its biggest rival, Notre Dame rode the legs of senior running back Theo Riddick to the BCS National Championship Game.

Riddick, who has bounced between receiver and running

back over the last three seasons, turned in the best game of his career as the Irish defeated USC 22-13. The senior rushed for 146 yards — a career high — and added 33 receiving yards while breaking countless tackles throughout the game.

“If you want to know about the Fighting Irish, you just need to look at Theo Riddick,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said. “Here’s a guy that was a wide

receiver for me the first two years, we asked him to move back to running back, and in game 12 he manages 140 yards, but broke countless tackles and got us the tough yards that we needed today.”

Riddick’s versatility as a running back was on display all over the field throughout the Irish victory. The senior from Manville, N.J., kept sophomore quarterback Everett Golson from pressure

with flawless pass blocking and caught three passes — including a crucial third-down conversion along the Notre Dame sideline.

But it was his bruising rushing performance that earned his coach’s accolades. Many of Riddick’s 146 yards on the ground came after contact.

“You just look at his jersey after the game and you go, ‘There’s no wonder why this team has the toughness that it does,’” Kelly said.

Though the 5-foot-11, 200-pound back has gained a reputation for playing like a much larger back due to his bruising style, Riddick said his ability to run after contact is just his natural instinct.

“I was just running hard. That’s what I’m supposed to do,” he said of his performance. “The offensive line did a great job today. I was able to explore holes and make people miss.”

“It was just great to see all the linemen doing their jobs up front, and moving those big guys to make great holes for us. Like I said, my hat goes off to my offensive linemen. Without them, there’s no me.”

Riddick produced the offensive highlight of the game for Notre Dame as the Irish clung to a 19-13 lead with 7:47 left on 1st-and-10 from the USC 26-yard line. Riddick took a handoff as USC defensive lineman Morgan Breslin and safety Josh Shaw broke

through the line and looked sure to drop him for a loss. Riddick quickly spun away from the pursuing defenders and broke through a hole, driving through cornerback Nickell Robey downfield for a 15-yard gain into the red zone. The run set up a chip-shot field goal for sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza that proved to be the game’s final score.

“My will is the same throughout every game. I mean I never try to go down easy,” Riddick said. “I keep on fighting. I was lucky to get out of some tackles today.”

On a night Notre Dame fans will not soon forget, Riddick completed his season-long return from receiver to running back by taking 20 handoffs and running right into Notre Dame lore. For Riddick, it was the final regular-season game of a career played at multiple positions with his teammates in mind.

“What can I say? I play for my teammates. During those transitions, I didn’t really have a problem with it,” Riddick said. “Coach Kelly wanted me to play wide receiver, I played it. Getting back in the backfield, I did that too. I do it for my teammates ... I’m a team guy. I have been my whole career. I’ll do anything for my teammates.”

Contact Chris Allen at callen10@nd.edu

THE ROAD TO 12-0



WIN
NUMBER
1
SEPT. 1

NOTRE DAME 50, NAVY 10



WIN
NUMBER
2
SEPT. 8

NOTRE DAME 20, PURDUE 17



WIN
NUMBER
3
SEPT. 15

NOTRE DAME 20, MICHIGAN STATE 3



WIN
NUMBER
4
SEPT. 22

NOTRE DAME 13, MICHIGAN 6



WIN
NUMBER
5
OCT. 6

NOTRE DAME 41, MIAMI 3



WIN
NUMBER
6
OCT. 13

NOTRE DAME 20, STANFORD 13 (OT)



WIN
NUMBER
7
OCT. 20

NOTRE DAME 17, BYU 14



WIN
NUMBER
8
OCT. 27

NOTRE DAME 30, OKLAHOMA 13



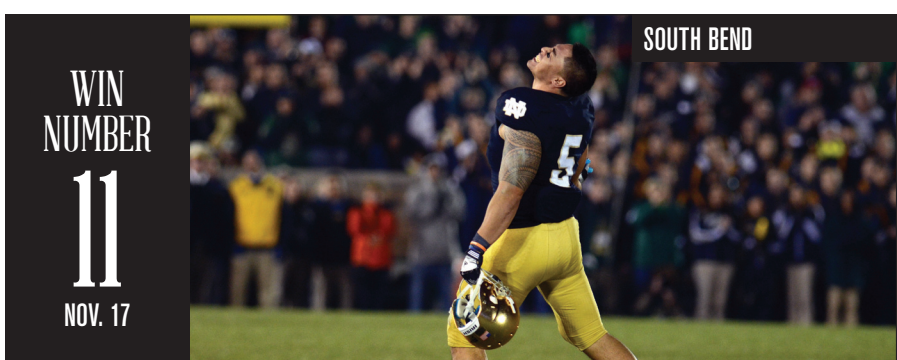
WIN
NUMBER
9
NOV. 3

NOTRE DAME 29, PITTSBURGH 26 (30T)



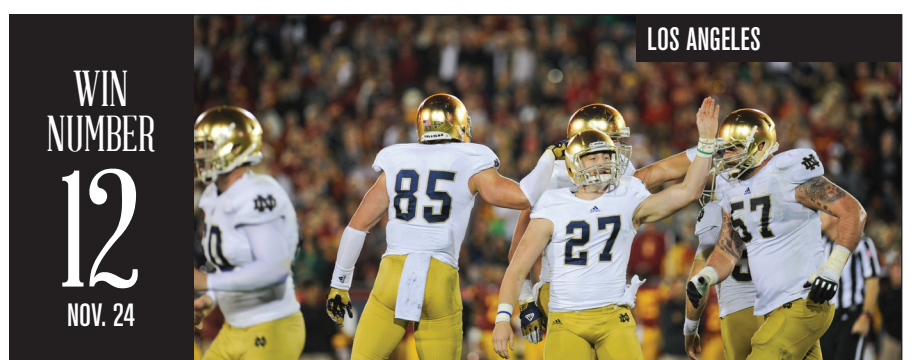
WIN
NUMBER
10
NOV. 10

NOTRE DAME 21, BOSTON COLLEGE 6



WIN
NUMBER
11
NOV. 17

NOTRE DAME 38, WAKE FOREST 0



WIN
NUMBER
12
NOV. 24

NOTRE DAME 22, USC 13

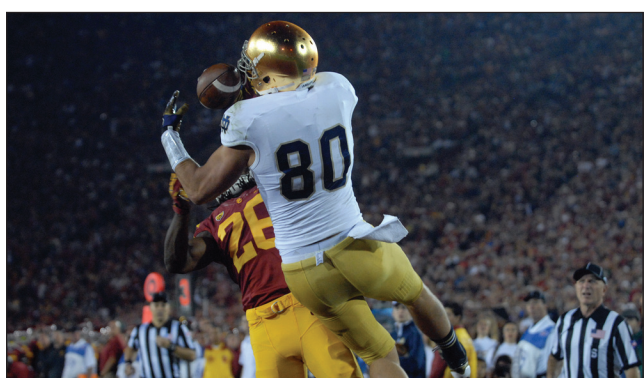


SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Senior running back Theo Riddick crosses the goal line to score Notre Dame's only touchdown of the game in its 22-13 win over USC. Sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza added five field goals as Notre Dame took the victory to go 12-0. Riddick rushed for 146 yards and added 33 yards receiving in the most productive game of his career.

NEXT STOP: MIAMI

The Irish completed a regular season for the ages under the lights in Los Angeles, defeating USC 22-13 to go 12-0. Senior running back Theo Riddick ran for a career-high 146 yards on 20 carries and senior linebacker Manti Te'o intercepted his seventh pass of the season. Notre Dame is likely to play either Alabama or Georgia in the BCS National Championship Game on Jan. 7.



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Senior tight end Tyler Eifert juggles the ball before making a catch near the sidelines. Eifert led the Irish in receiving yards



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Junior nose guard Louis Nix stuffs a USC ballcarrier. USC rushed for only 95 yards on the night.



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson dives to complete a run. Golson rushed for 47 yards on the day.



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Sophomore kick returner George Atkinson catches a USC kickoff before a return. Atkinson's 39-yard kickoff return in the fourth quarter set up a late score for Notre Dame.



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson hands the ball off to senior running back Cierre Wood. Wood added 20 yards rushing as Notre Dame rushed for 222 yards as a team.