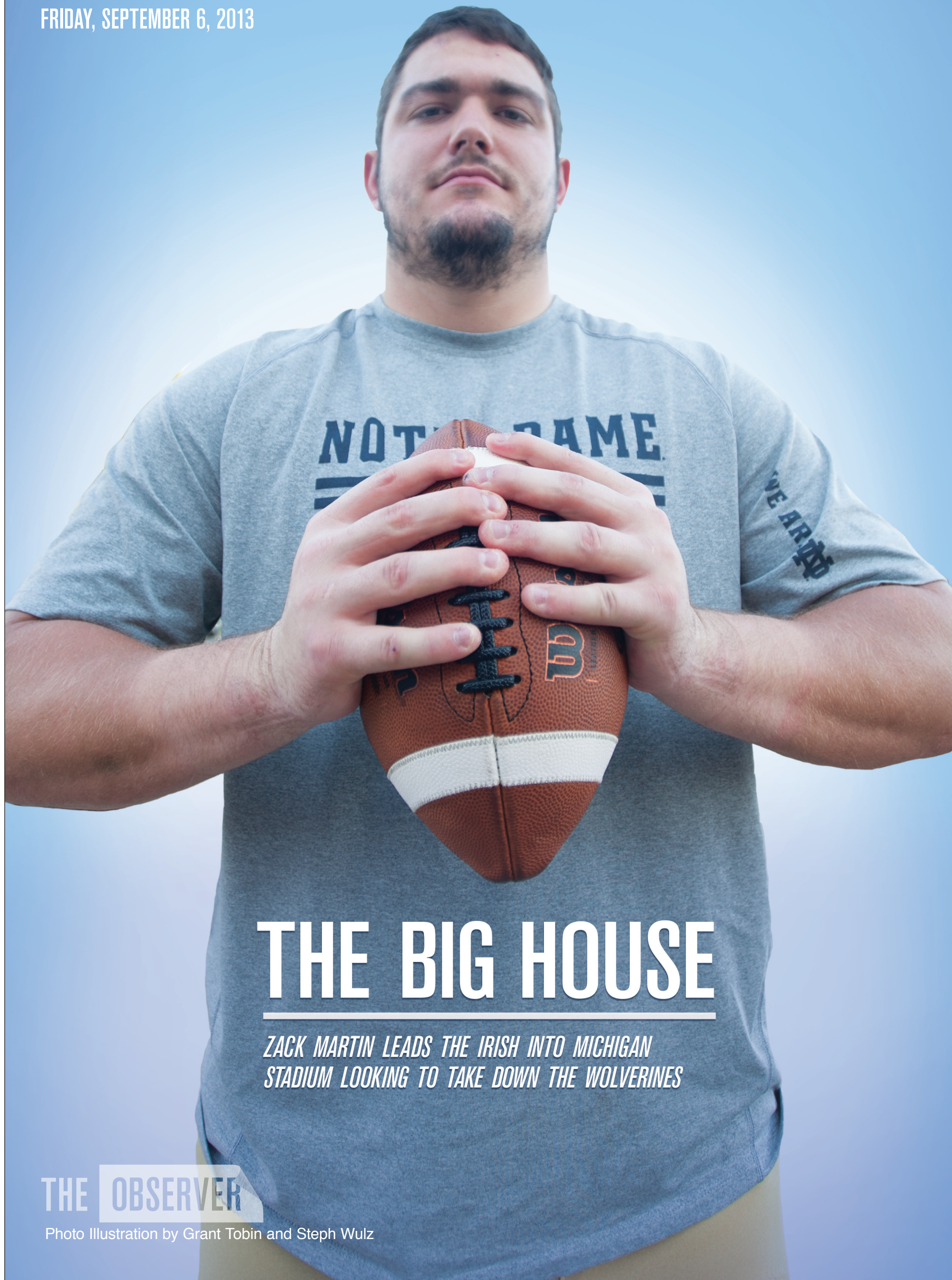


IRISH INSIDER

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2013



THE BIG HOUSE

*ZACK MARTIN LEADS THE IRISH INTO MICHIGAN
STADIUM LOOKING TO TAKE DOWN THE WOLVERINES*

THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Grant Tobin and Steph Wulz

COMMENTARY

No place to hide in Michigan Stadium



Jack Hefferon
Sports Writer

The dress rehearsal went off smoothly enough. Some bumps here, some early kinks to work out there.

But Saturday night, the curtain will truly rise on the 2013 Irish. And if past trips to Ann Arbor are any indication, some theatrics will probably ensue.

The Big House will be packed, and the bright lights will be on once again. Two years ago, they were turned on in Michigan Stadium for the first time, and most of the Midwest turned out for the show.

Those lights will expose Brian Kelly's squad, one way or another. They got the compulsory result against Temple, but the process could use some work. The offense showed its ability to hit home runs, but its stable of running backs struggled at times to grind out yards.

The defense is as deep as it has ever been but showed some rust at every level last week. And the kicking game is still a Touchdown Jesus-sized question mark, which is exactly the opposite of what you want in a hostile, primetime environment.

The opponent will be ready and pose a challenge that will give the Irish everything they can handle. Vegas has the Wolverines as three-and-a-half point favorites, which by the standard bettor's rule of thumb for home field advantage (part of any good Irish Catholic education), means these teams are about as even as they come.

Career antagonist Denard Robinson was vanquished in his final act last year, but now Michigan returns with Devin Gardner, who can run

nearly as well as Robinson — and can actually throw the ball, too.

Michigan's defense has several new faces and will attack the Irish in ways they haven't seen before, forcing Rees and new play-caller Chuck Martin to adjust on the fly. And even if Notre Dame can handle the 11 Wolverines on the field, there will still be over 100,000 of them to deal with in the stands.

Most of the focus this week has been on how to classify the Notre Dame-Michigan rivalry, or whether it is even a rivalry at all. (It is a rivalry, and it's one of Notre Dame's top two. Moving on.)

But it doesn't matter if Saturday is Notre Dame's last trip to the Big House, what the history of the two schools is, or who is chickening out of what. Saturday's game matters — not because of the series' past or future — because it's all about this year.

Can the Irish offense take care of the football? Can the defense contain an explosive dual threat? And can this year's Irish squad show that last season's success was no fluke?

We'll get those answers Saturday, in Notre Dame's first big opportunity of the year to show what it can be.

'GameDay' and the ESPN cameras will be out in Ann Arbor. A small country will be packed in the stands. A top-20 opponent will be waiting on the field. And those lights, exposing and illuminating, will be shined down on the Irish once again.

It's showtime.

Contact Jack Hefferon at jheffero@nd.edu

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

RECRUITING

Teams stake reputations on high-profile matchup

By **MIKE MONACO**
Sports Editor

On Sunday, Irish coach Brian Kelly downplayed the importance of the Michigan-Notre Dame rivalry. On Tuesday, Kelly similarly dialed down the discussion of a recruiting rivalry between the two Midwest programs.

"When you're recruiting nationally and you're out, Michigan is going to be there in the recruiting process for us, but we'll see the West Coast, we'll see the South," Kelly said at his weekly press conference. "I mean, I don't know that Michigan shows up more than any one school because we're all over the country. It's a blend of virtually all the schools throughout the country."

Irish recruiting expert Mike Frank spoke before Kelly's news conference Tuesday and echoed the same sentiment. Frank said he doesn't believe the rivalry is as important to head-to-head recruiting battles between Notre Dame and Michigan.

"It's been interesting when you talk about this game. I think really before it was a lot more important in the grand scheme of things when you talk about recruiting and going head-to-head with players," said Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliated Irish Sports Daily. "I don't think Notre Dame and Michigan go head-to-head for a lot of players nearly as much as they used to. Why that is? I think Notre Dame has broadened their base a little bit and tried to get players from all over the country."

While the rivalry may not be ramped-up within the region, Frank said he believes the performance of each team in primetime can be helpful in the same national recruiting picture to which Kelly alluded.

"Where I do think [the rivalry game] matters is you've got two big, traditional schools going head-to-head and both are extremely respected programs," Frank said. "And I think it matters a lot to people who are interested in maybe leaving home and looking at a school like Michigan or Notre Dame. If they see that Notre Dame can beat another big-time regional school, it kind of validates the choice to attend there."

"So I think even more than bragging rights, it has to do with how each school is perceived and the direction each program is headed."

Frank said he expects Saturday's game to have a major impact on recruits in the class of 2014 as well as the class of 2015. The class of 2014 already has 16 commitments, but Frank said the game could impact seniors from across the nation, including those already interested in Notre Dame like California athlete

Michiah Quick and Florida defensive tackle Anthony Moten, as well as those who have not expressed any interest.

"February is still a long ways away and, at this time last year, [freshman safety] Max Redfield and [former Irish commit] Eddie Vanderdoes weren't on the radar," Frank said. "Opportunities open up with other teams. There may be other prospects that aren't on the radar right now. I think those are the kinds of things that matter for 2014."

As for the class of 2015, Sunday was a big day in recruiting even though there were no commitments or decommitments to or from Notre Dame.

With the calendar flipping to September, communication is now allowed with prospects in the class of 2015. Coaches may send personalized letters to recruits and are allowed to reply to and send e-mails to high school juniors.

As it stands now, Notre Dame has received just one commitment from the class of 2015. Offensive lineman Jerry Tillery, a 6-foot-7, 312-pound tackle from Shreveport, La., pledged to the Irish on June 22nd. ESPN rates Tillery as the 18th-best tackle and the 205th-best overall player in the nation.

Frank said Saturday's contest with Michigan will go a long way toward sculpting the opinions of other prospects in the junior class.

"Right now those prospects are forming their opinions on where they think Notre Dame is headed as far as the direction of the program," he said. "Was last year a one-season fluke or is this a legitimate top-10 program at this point? I think these types of

games kind of validate people's opinions on where Notre Dame is as a program."

Frank said Notre Dame simply has not extended offers to a great deal of 2015 prospects yet. One player with an Irish offer, however, is Minnesota defensive end Jashon Cornell. ESPN rates Cornell, who hails from the same school (Cretin-Derham Hall High School) that produced former Irish receiver Michael Floyd and current freshman receiver James Onwualu, as the No. 1 overall player in the nation.

Though Cornell is expected to visit Michigan this weekend, Frank said the Irish still have a strong shot at landing the 6-foot-3, 245-pounder. Frank mentioned how Floyd and Irish freshman offensive lineman Steve Elmer took visits to Notre Dame opponents when they were being recruited by both schools, watched Notre Dame lose and ended up committing to the Irish anyway.

"Jashon Cornell is a tremendous prospect and Notre Dame has a really, really good shot with him but I think when you're the No. 1 prospect, or certainly one of the top defenders in the country, you're going to have a whole lot of teams coming after you," Frank said. "But you know he'll be down for a Notre Dame game as well and we'll just have to see how it plays out, but I think Notre Dame is in real good shape with him."

For more on Notre Dame recruiting, check out Mike Frank's irishsportsdaily.com. Email Mike at mikefrank18@sbcglobal.net and tell him The Observer sent you.

Contact Mike Monaco at jmonaco@nd.edu

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LINE LEADER

By **MIKE MONACO**
Sports Editor

It's a few minutes after 6 p.m. on Wednesday. Practice is wrapping up.

The sound system blasts B.o.B's "Magic" and Joan Jett & the Blackhearts' "I Love Rock 'n' Roll." Players begin to filter out from the LaBar Practice Complex.

After about five minutes, most of the players have filtered out and the music stops. The only sounds are those of a few scattered students, chatting away, as they walk around the east side of campus.

Fifteen minutes pass. There's still a group of Irish players, including the offensive line, out practicing on the field in relative silence. The autograph hounds have left. There's no longer a need for the ushers directing traffic.

Around 6:25, the offensive linemen make their way off the field.

Graduate student offensive tackle Zack Martin leads them.

Leading on the fly

Martin can't pinpoint exactly when he first captained a team or led a group in school. But he knows it happened in middle school. And it continued in high school.

Martin, now in his fifth season with the Irish and with 40 consecutive starts under his belt, is the 18th two-time captain in the history of Notre Dame football. Martin said he hasn't had the time to fully sit back and think about the importance of being one of just 18 players with that distinction, but he feels honored.

"It was right before the [season-opening] game so we just kind of got everything going, but after last year you get a chance to kind of sit back and find out how much of an honor it actually is when you meet some former guys who have been in that position," Martin said. "To have the opportunity to do it a second time is even more of an honor, to have the opportunity to lead this team and hopefully to a successful season."

But Martin said his

leadership started long before these past two years.

"I'd say when I got here after a couple years of playing I was definitely more of an example guy, just try to go out there and do everything at 100 miles an hour and try to get the younger guys to see what it takes to be a starter, to be a good player," Martin said. "Over time, you know, I'm still that same guy but I try to add the vocal part, especially being a captain."

Fellow graduate student offensive lineman Chris Watt has literally been Martin's right-hand man for the past two years. In 2011 and 2012, Watt started all 26 games at left guard, while Martin manned left tackle. Over those two seasons, Watt said he has seen a similar growth in Martin.

"He's always been a leader. He's been more of a quiet leader, leader by example in the previous years when he's first starting out because it's kind of hard to be that vocal guy when you're starting out as a freshman or a sophomore," Watt said. "He's really developed these last two years becoming a bigger leader for the team vocally and also continuing to do that on the field as well."

Junior center Nick Martin joins his older brother on the offensive line. Nick, who is in his first season as a starter, said he saw Zack's leadership from Day One.

"My freshman year, I remember the first padded practice of camp, [Zack] broke down the whole team," Nick said. "He was only a red-shirt sophomore at the time. I was really surprised. He was an underclassman and he was breaking down the whole team. That's when I really knew how good he was going to be."

Leading in the quiet

It's still remarkably quiet outside the Guglielmino Athletic Complex, where the rest of the squad has reached the locker room. Some players have left entirely. Others have already begun talking to the media.

Zack and the rest of the offensive line make their way toward the brick building, the spotlight completely off

them. After all, it's still three days away from Saturday's rivalry game with Michigan.

Martin walks into the Gug quietly, occasionally making small talk with teammates and laughing softly. Martin said his leadership is different during the week, away from the bright lights and loudness of a game day.

"During the week, you're trying to go the entire day full-go," he said. "And during the week I'd say it's a lot more [leading by] example because you're trying to show the younger guys how to prepare for a game and how hard you really have to go to be ready for a game."

During the dog days of summer, all of the work is behind the scenes. Coaches are not allowed to have contact with their players for the eight designated weeks of voluntary summer conditioning activities. That's when Martin stepped up to do his leading by example, in between and around summer classes.

"We didn't have class in the afternoons so we would come in and work out [early]," Martin said. "Freshman year it's crazy. You've got to come in to study hall, classes. So they wouldn't work out until later, about 4:00. So me, Chris Watt and the older guys kind of just took it upon us to stay after we worked out and work those freshmen out."

"We had five freshmen offensive linemen. It's a very talented group. That's one of the main things [offensive line] coach [Harry] Hiestand taught us when he got here was we do things together and we don't leave anyone else behind."

As far away from the spotlight as Martin and his fellow linemen were, the story made its way back to Irish head coach Brian Kelly.

"The stories that I've heard this summer, absolutely incredible," Kelly said of Martin at media day Aug. 22. "... That just does not happen. But because of him, he's been able to up the play of all of our younger players

Graduate student offensive lineman Zack Martin will line up against the Wolverines for the final time in his career Saturday.

Observer File Photo

exponentially. So he's made others around him better."

In addition to making others better, Martin himself has constantly improved. In each of the past three seasons, the 6-foot-4, 308-pounder has won Notre Dame's Offensive Lineman of the Year award. Following the 2012 campaign, Martin was named a second-team All-American by the Walter Camp Foundation.

"He's in a very small percentage of players that play this game that has the ability to do what he does on a daily basis," Hiestand said at media day. "And there are a lot of people that can lead from time to time when it feels convenient or when it feels good or you're having a good day, but Zack brings it every day and that's what sets him apart and makes him such a unique and special player."

"He's the picture of what an All-American is. He's an All-American football player and offensive lineman that has all the abilities and skills that you look for to say, 'that's the example of what we want to accomplish.'"

Leading loudly

As perfect an example as Martin may be, and as quiet as it might be for Martin and the offensive line during the week, everything changes as the decibel levels increase on Saturdays. Martin himself said he invokes a completely different leadership style. Leading by example is no longer enough.

"On Saturday, you've got a lot of things to worry about, so it's more of a vocal leadership," Martin said. "Obviously, you're trying to do your job and people are looking at that, but definitely more of the vocal side on Saturdays."

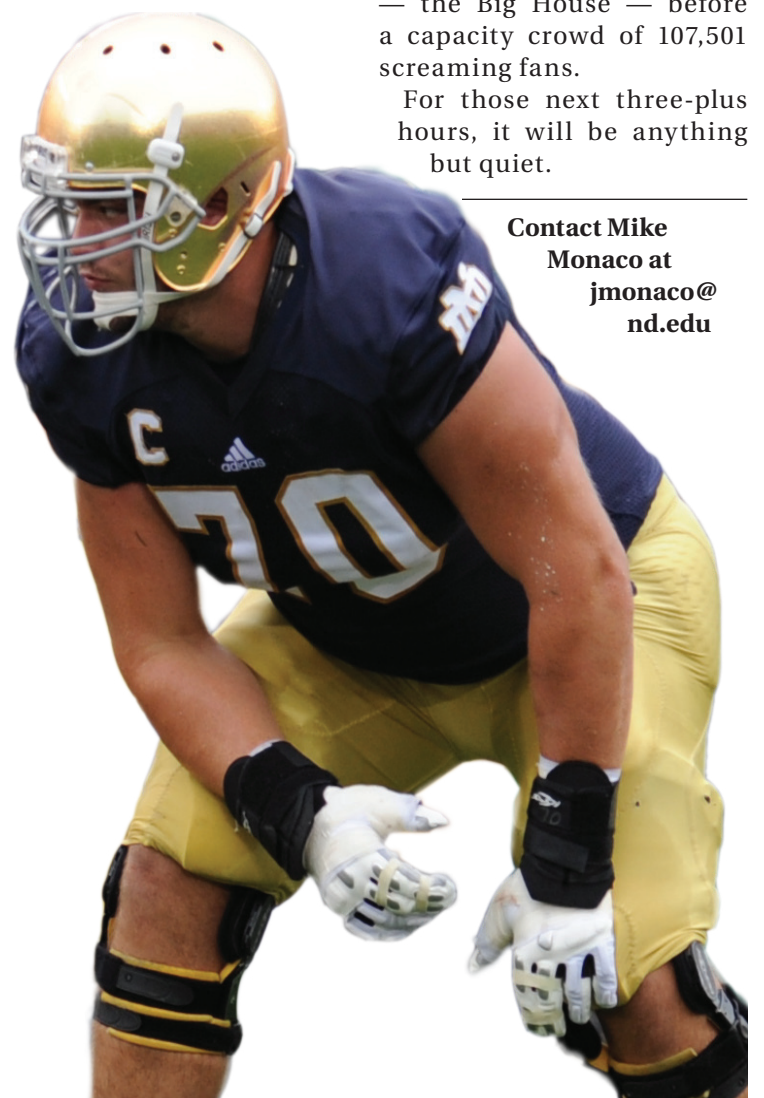
Martin said while the coaches handle the team-wide, pre-game speeches, he shares his own words with his fellow offensive linemen.

"It's different each week," Martin said. "But we always break down on 'Together.' Basically, the gist of it is being together and playing together today."

After that speech on Saturday, Martin and the rest of the offensive line will head out of the tunnel to take the field at Michigan Stadium — the Big House — before a capacity crowd of 107,501 screaming fans.

For those next three-plus hours, it will be anything but quiet.

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LAUREN FRITZ | The Observer



JOHN NING | The Observer

IRISH PASSING

Senior quarterback Tommy Rees was impressive in Notre Dame's season opener, throwing for 346 yards, three touchdowns and — most importantly — zero interceptions. The Irish showed an ability to stretch the field for long gainers, with Rees lobbing throws down the sidelines to let his receivers make plays on the ball. Senior TJ Jones has been praised by Irish coach Brian Kelly as one of the best receivers in the college game, and he has showed early signs of being a potential go-to guy for Notre Dame on offense.

The Wolverines secondary is much younger after losing four-year starter Jordan Kovacs at safety, and senior safety and captain Courtney Avery is questionable for Saturday as he tries to return from knee surgery. Redshirt sophomore safety Blake Countess is also returning from a knee surgery that cost him all of last season, and will face his first real test on Saturday. Michigan's corners average 5-foot-10 and 180 pounds, which could open opportunities for Rees to let Irish receivers Daniel Smith and Corey Robinson — both of whom are 6-foot-4 — win jump-ball battles outside.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH RUSHING

Notre Dame has already trotted out five viable running backs this season, and a balanced workload resulted in nearly 200 yards rushing last week against Temple. George Atkinson is a threat to break free on every play, and Amir Carlisle and Cam McDaniel showed they can take some of the workload as well. The most important man in the run game may be left tackle Zack Martin, who along with left guard and fellow senior Chris Watt can be expected to clear a path on nearly every play.

Michigan held Notre Dame to 94 yards on 31 carries last season, and allowed the Irish just one rush over 10 yards. Linebacker Jake Ryan was huge in that effort, and led the team in tackles last season, but will miss the first half of the 2013 season with an ACL tear. The Wolverines will attempt to make up for that loss with an improved front line that includes senior defensive tackle Jibreel Black — whom Kelly tried to recruit at Cincinnati — and junior Frank Clark, a former safety who bulked up and moved down to play defensive end.

No matter how prepared Michigan is for the Irish run game, Notre Dame's ability to put in fresh legs in the fourth quarter (and thanks to their new pistol formation, have them run downhill more than ever) should be a huge advantage late in the game.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

Last week, for the first time in his career, Brian Kelly did not call his offense's plays. That task was delegated to offensive coordinator Chuck Martin and the transition was seamless, as the Irish gained over 350 yards in the first half alone. Notre Dame's foray into the pistol offense looked to be an early success, as well.

However, Wolverines defensive coordinator Greg Mattison is a former coordinator of the Baltimore Ravens famed defense, and engineered a unit that allowed the Irish just 13 points after six Michigan turnovers last year.

EDGE: EVEN

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

The Irish entered the season with an open kicking competition between Nick Tausch and Kyle Brindza, only to have both placekickers miss their attempts last week. Kelly has yet to declare a winner, leaving doubt around the position that could decide Saturday's game. Brindza has taken over punting duties as well this season, and has shown off his strong leg but not much control as of yet. George Atkinson is dangerous on every kickoff return, and TJ Jones has brought a previously unheard of spark to punt returns.

EDGE: MICHIGAN

IRISH SCHEDULE (1-0)

Aug. 31	Temple	W 28-6
Sept. 7	@ Michigan	
Sept. 14	@ Purdue	
Sept. 21	Michigan State	
Sept. 26	Oklahoma	
Oct. 5	vs. Arizona State	
Oct. 19	USC	
Oct. 26	@ Air Force	
Nov. 2	Navy	
Nov. 9	@ Pittsburgh	
Nov. 23	BYU	
Nov. 30	@ Stanford	

HEAD T

ON ABC

NO. 14 NOTRE DAME



(Sr.) TJ Jones 7 WR
(Fr.) Corey Robinson 88
(Jr.) DaVaris Daniels 10 WR
(Sr.) Daniel Smith 87

(Gr.) Zack Martin 70 LT
(Fr.) Hunter Bivin 57

(Jr.) George Atkinson 4 RB
(Jr.) Amir Carlisle 3

(Gr.) Chris Watt 66 LG
(So.) Mark Harrell 75

(Sr.) Tommy Rees 10 QB
(Sr.) Andrew Hendrix 12

(Jr.) Nick Martin 72 C
(Jr.) Matt Hegarty 77

(Sr.) Christian Lombard 74 RG
(Jr.) Conor Hanratty 65

(So.) Ronnie Stanley 78 RT
(Fr.) Steve Elmer 79

(Jr.) Troy Niklas 85 TE
(Jr.) Ben Koyack 18

(So.) Chris Brown 2 WR
(Fr.) James Onwualu 17



(So.) KeiVarae Russell 6 CB
(Sr.) Lo Wood 23

(Sr.) Austin Collinsworth 28 S
(So.) Elijah Shumate 22

(Fr.) Jaylon Smith 9 OLB
(Jr.) Ben Councill 30

(Gr.) Dan Fox 48 ILB
(Jr.) Jarrett Grace 59

(So.) Sheldon Day 91 DE
(Fr.) Isaac Rochell 90

(Gr.) Carlo Calabrese 44 ILB
(Sr.) Kendall Moore 8

(Sr.) Louis Nix 1 NG
(Sr.) Kona Schwenke 96

(Jr.) Matthias Farley 41 S
(Jr.) Eilar Hardy 16

(Jr.) Stephon Tuitt 7 DE
(So.) Jarron Jones 94

(Sr.) Prince Shembo 55 OLB
(Jr.) Ishaq Williams 11

(Sr.) Bennett Jackson 2 CB
(Fr.) Cole Luke 36



(Gr.) Nick Tausch 40 PK
(Jr.) Kyle Brindza 27

(Jr.) Kyle Brindza 27 KO

(Jr.) Kyle Brindza 27 P
(Gr.) Alex Wulfeck 98

(Jr.) George Atkinson 4 KR
(Jr.) Cam McDaniel 33

(Sr.) TJ Jones 7 PR
(Jr.) Amir Carlisle 3

(So.) Scott Daly 61 LS



Andrew Gastelum
Editor-in-Chief



Matthew DeFranks
Assistant Managing Editor



Mike Monaco
Sports Editor

This is a rivalry game, there shouldn't be any doubt about it. To some of the coaches, maybe not (or maybe it's just pure mind games), but to anyone who has come through Notre Dame or Michigan in the last 20 years there has hardly been a game that is as anticipated as this one.

There is no more Denard to terrorize Te'o. There is no more Te'o to terrorize Denard.

No more stars. Now it just comes down to fundamentals, strategy and who hates the other more. It's going to be a tough defensive struggles and a battle between the defensive minds of defensive coordinators Bob Diaco and Greg Mattison.

It's the last time at the Big House for a while, so I'm expecting a big finish.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 24, Michigan 23

Is this game going to be an offensive explosion? Is it going to be a defensive struggle? I have no idea, and neither do you.

Devin Gardner is a relative unknown as it relates to Notre Dame fans and the Irish faithful are hopeful he is not a Denard Robinson clone. The good news is that Gardner is not at all like Robinson. The bad news is that he is a better passer than Robinson could have ever dreamed of.

The Irish defense was not at their best last week despite allowing just a single touchdown to a dismal Temple offense. They need to be better against the Wolverines and I think they will be.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 27, Michigan 17

This isn't 2012. And this isn't 2011. Last year was a defensive struggle, and 2011 was a ... well, I think most Notre Dame students remember that.

The 2013 rendition of the "rivalry" will be somewhere in between. Neither team will score like 2011 and Michigan won't throw another five interceptions this year.

But the game will again be close. At this point, the offenses are still a toss-up. The Irish offense — though it struggled to convert yards into points against Temple — still racked up 543 yards against the Owls, while Michigan put 59 points and 463 yards on the board against Central Michigan.

On defense, Notre Dame brings back eight starters to Michigan's five, and Bob Diaco will dial up the right calls to do enough to thwart Devin Gardner.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 21, Michigan 20

0 HEAD

8:00 P.M.

NO. 17 MICHIGAN

MICHIGAN STADIUM



KARLA MORENO | The Observer



KARLA MORENO | The Observer



CB **18** Blake Countess (Jr.)
8 Channing Stribling (Fr.)

WLB **15** James Ross III (So.)
52 Royce Jenkins-Stone (So.)

DE **57** Frank Clark (Jr.)
53 Mario Ojemudia (So.)

NT **76** Quinton Washington (R-Sr.)
56 Ondre Pipkins (So.)

DT **55** Jibreel Black (Sr.)
96 Ryan Glasgow (So.)

DE **92** Keith Heitzman (Jr.)
99 Matt Godin (So.)

SLB **4** Cam Gordon (R-Sr.)
97 Brennen Beyer (Jr.)

CB **6** Raymon Taylor (Jr.)
24 Delonte Hollowell (Jr.)

WR **86** Jehu Chesson (R-Fr.)
17 Jeremy Jackson (Sr.)

WR **9** Drew Dileo (Sr.)
23 Dennis Norfleet (So.)

RT **75** Michael Schofield (R-Sr.)
78 Erik Magnuson (R-Fr.)

RG **67** Kyle Kalis (R-Fr.)
56 Joey Burzynski (R-Jr.)

C **60** Jack Miller (R-So.)
56 Joey Burzynski (R-Jr.)

LG **61** Graham Glasgow (R-So.)
58 Chris Bryant (R-So.)

LT **77** Taylor Lewan (R-Sr.)
71 Ben Braden (R-Fr.)

TE **87** Devin Funchess (So.)
84 A.J. Williams (So.)

WR **21** Jeremy Gallon (R-Sr.)
85 Joe Reynolds (R-Sr.)

KO **45** Matt Wile (Jr.)

KR **23** Dennis Norfleet (So.)
9 Drew Dileo (Sr.)

LS **54** Jareth Glanda (R-Sr.)

PK **34** Brendan Gibbons (R-Sr.)
45 Matt Wile (Jr.)

P **45** Matt Wile (Jr.)
91 Kenny Allen (R-Fr.)

PR **23** Dennis Norfleet (So.)
9 Drew Dileo (Sr.)



WOLVERINES PASSING

Denard is gone. But Devin is in.

Irish fans may be rejoicing that Denard Robinson, their scrambling, shoelaceless nemesis for so many years, has finally moved on to torment someone else. Redshirt junior Devin Gardner isn't the same runner Robinson was — few in the history of the game ever have been. But the former wide receiver can move just fine, and has an arm to go with it, as well. Notre Dame was able to solve the Robinson dilemma last fall, but Michigan is moving to the pro-style offense under Gardner, which will pose a whole new slate of problems to the Irish secondary.

That Notre Dame secondary comes in with another year under its collective belt, and has transitioned from a liability to a weapon. The Irish did a good job of keeping receivers in front of them in their opener, and should be well equipped to deal with veteran Wolverine receivers Jeremy Gallon and Drew Dileo. Dynamic sophomore tight end Devin Funchess could present some issues as well, and will test Notre Dame's rangy outside linebackers.

EDGE: EVEN

WOLVERINES RUSHING

Once again, this would seem to be an area where Michigan will miss Robinson. But Gardner's arm should keep the Irish from stacking the box like they did against Denard, which will allow Gardner to pick his spots and break it big. That seems especially likely after watching Notre Dame defend against Temple's pro-style offense last week. Owls quarterback Connor Reilly is nowhere near as athletic as Gardner but still ran for 77 yards on 12 carries. Add in sturdy fifth-year running back Fitzgerald Toussaint and future first-round pick Taylor Lewan at left guard, and the Irish will have their hands full in gameplanning for Saturday.

If there's anyone that can get the job done, it's the dynamite front seven of Notre Dame, featuring names like Nix, Tuitt, and Shembo. But just like when they faced off with Shoelaces, stopping Michigan's run game may just be a case

of limiting the damage.

EDGE: MICHIGAN

WOLVERINES OFFENSIVE COACHING

Wolverines offensive coordinator Al Borges has averaged nearly 400 yards per game in his two years at Michigan, and is in the process of retooling his offense around a more traditional quarterback.

His counterpart on Saturday will be Irish defensive coordinator Bob Diaco, who bottled the Wolverines and held them to just six points last season. Diaco's defense was exposed by Temple, and now he'll have a week to figure out the issues and deliver the message. After watching Notre Dame's historic defense dominate last year under his schemes, it'd be hard to imagine the Irish being beaten in the same fashion in consecutive weeks.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

WOLVERINES SPECIAL TEAMS

At 5-foot-7, Wolverines sophomore return man Dennis Norfleet can get lost in a crowd extremely easily — and show up again 50 yards downfield. Fifth-year senior Brendan Gibbons made his last 13 kicks last season, and is still perfect early on in the 2014 campaign.

Notre Dame's kick coverage teams have been very strong of late, and will hope to keep Michigan from getting a big momentum play on returns. But at the end of the game, Michigan can turn to an all-senior battery of snapper, holder, and kicker — which might just be the difference in front of another world record crowd.

EDGE: MICHIGAN

WOLVERINES SCHEDULE (1-0)

Aug. 31 **Central Michigan** W 59-9
Sept. 7 **Notre Dame**
Sept. 14 **Akron**
Sept. 21 **@ Connecticut**
Oct. 5 **Minnesota**
Oct. 12 **@ Penn State**
Oct. 19 **Indiana**
Nov. 2 **@ Michigan State**
Nov. 9 **Nebraska**
Nov. 16 **@ Northwestern**
Nov. 23 **@ Iowa**
Nov. 30 **Ohio State**



Joseph Monardo
Associate Sports Editor

Both teams impressed against vastly inferior competition in week one, but now it is time to see how good the respective teams actually are. Based on what the Irish showed last week, the defense could struggle mightily against senior quarterback Devin Gardner should he manage to escape the pressure in the pocket and improvise with his feet.

However, this is still (at least in part) the Irish defense that kept opponents out of the end zone as if the glory of Mary depended on it last year and last week held Temple to only six points even in a vastly imperfect performance. Touchdowns will be hard to come by for both teams, but Rees and TJ Jones will come up with some big plays while the recently beleaguered Irish kicking game steps up.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 20, Michigan 16



Jack Hefferon
Sports Writer

Darn right Notre Dame-Michigan is a rivalry, and the hatred between the schools owes as much to the years they haven't played each other as to the years they have. This is likely the last time these schools will play in the Big House this decade, and that urgency will show in a tight game Saturday.

The Irish defense will need to step up to contain Devin Gardner, and Tommy Rees will need to continue to take care of the football to keep the Irish in it.

It won't be pretty. Michigan Stadium will be throbbing. There'll be turnovers, mistakes and heart attacks. This one could go either way, but the night ends with the visitors taking the rivalry's bragging rights back to South Bend.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 29, Michigan 26 (OT)

Hear about Zack Martin's romantic side in the new "Lightning Round" video series at

**youtube.com/
NDSMCObsERVER**

Cherished rivalry says goodbye to Big House



KIRBY MCKENNA | The Observer

Irish senior quarterback Tommy Rees looks for a receiver during Notre Dame's 13-6 win over Michigan last season at Notre Dame Stadium. Rees and the Irish will make their final visit to Michigan Stadium on Saturday night for the foreseeable future. The Notre Dame-Michigan series is set to go on a hiatus after next year's matchup at Notre Dame.

By **ANDREW GASTELUM**
Editor-in-Chief

It all started with a sealed letter handed off from one NCAA powerhouse to the next prior to just another installment of the famed Notre Dame-Michigan series on Sept. 22, 2012. In just the last two seasons, the two programs have fielded a perennial ESPN Classic re-run, two Heisman candidates and two BCS bowl appearances to renew fervor for the glory days of old.

But with that letter, it turned out, Notre Dame Director of Athletics Jack Swarbrick thought the Irish should see other people starting in 2015. Now the uproar has shifted from ending a rivalry to arguing if it is even a rivalry at all.

"It is for us," Michigan coach Brady Hoke said at his Monday press conference. "Everybody looks at things differently."

Those comments came a day after the issue was put into question, when Irish coach Brian Kelly dubbed the series a "big regional game."

"I really haven't seen it as one of those historic, traditional Notre Dame rivalries," Kelly said Sunday. "I've seen it as just one of those great football games that Notre Dame has played."

Kelly seemed to backtrack on Tuesday, although he appeared miffed at how the amount

of attention and backlash he received.

"It's a great and historic rivalry that we'll be playing this Saturday, so let's get that out of the way right away so we don't have to answer any more questions about this rivalry," he said.

Rivalry or not, the matchup features the two programs with the highest all-time winning percentages in the NCAA. And Saturday will be the 41st matchup of the series, with Michigan leading 23-16-1.

But it could also be the last meeting at Michigan Stadium for quite some time, as Michigan Director of Intercollegiate Athletics Dave Brandon told The Detroit News on Wednesday there are no current discussions with Notre Dame.

"Our schedule is booked going out into the early [2020s] and my understanding is theirs is, as well," Brandon said. "So my view is the only way we're going to play Notre Dame after next year would be if we run into them in a bowl game or if our schedules allowed us to have some kind of a neutral site one-off game somewhere along the way."

The Irish have lost six of the last seven games at The Big House, with their last win coming in upset fashion in 2005. Of course, the last loss in Ann

Arbor may sting a bit more than the others, as the Wolverines took a 35-31 lead with two seconds remaining to seemingly renew the matchup's rivalry status.

"It's a huge national rivalry to be around that team and play that team," Michigan All-American tackle Taylor Lewan said. "The idea of a rivalry and being there on Saturday, it's a phenomenal feeling. ... It's unfortunate [that it's ending], but I'm going to get over it."

On Saturday, ESPN's 'College GameDay' will feature the series for the sixth time. The Notre

Dame-Michigan matchup is now tied with Miami-Florida State as the third-most visited matchup by 'College GameDay.' Notre Dame-Michigan is just one appearance behind the Florida-Florida State and Florida-Tennessee matchups in the show's history.

"I think it's great for college football," Hoke said. "It must have some sort of national appeal. ... I know that whenever Michigan and Notre Dame was on TV, I was going to be watching it. I know people in Corvallis, Ore., were going to be watching it, for one reason or

another."

The average margin of victory in the entire history of the series is 4.1 points, which only heightens the anticipation for an historic matchup that will soon meet its indefinite hiatus.

"It's our rival. I mean, it's Michigan," Irish defensive end Stephon Tuitt said. "Everybody wants to go home with that win, go home with that chip on their back saying they beat somebody. So [we] definitely want to go out hard."

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Dual-threat Gardner steps in at quarterback

By **JOSEPH MONARDO**
Associate Sports Editor

As the starting quarterback at Michigan, Denard Robinson terrorized the Irish defense, capturing two wins in three attempts. Shoelace has graduated, but No. 14 Notre Dame will have to try to keep another Wolverines quarterback tied up Saturday in the Big House.

Senior quarterback Devin Gardner has completed the shift from receiver to signal caller, and he brought a dynamic set of skills with him.

“He reminds me [former NFL quarterback] Randall Cunningham back there,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said. “He can throw it, he’s tall, he’s athletic, runs the ball very well.”

Robinson, who garnered buzz as a Heisman contender throughout his career, put up gaudy stats in his first two career starts against the Irish — both Michigan victories. In 2010 and 2011, Robinson totaled 366 yards rushing and 582 yards through the air while accounting for eight touchdowns.

However, Robinson also threw three interceptions

in 2011 before adding four more in 2012 while accumulating only 228 total yards in Michigan’s 13-6 loss in Notre Dame Stadium. Robinson possessed skills Gardner can’t duplicate, Kelly said, although he acknowledged Gardner is more of a threat with his arm than his predecessor was.

“Well, certainly from a running standpoint, I don’t know that we’ve ever played a guy like Robinson, I mean, his just electric speed that he could immediately go 80 yards,” he said.

“Having said that, you know, throwing the football, Gardner throws the football with much more accuracy. He pushes the ball down the field very easily. And he certainly scrambles very well, keeps his eyes downfield and is not afraid to run.”

Although he was not the starting quarterback, Gardner did play a minor role in last year’s meeting with Notre Dame, as he compiled 40 yards on three catches as a receiver. The Detroit native started eight games out wide for the Wolverines in 2012, totaling 266 yards on 16 catches before supplanting Robinson as the starting quarterback

for the final five contests of the season. Gardner scored at least two touchdowns in each of his starts while earning Big Ten Offensive Player of the Week honors twice. The converted receiver earned three consecutive wins before losing to Ohio State in Columbus and to South Carolina in the Outback Bowl. At the time, the Buckeyes and Gamecocks held rankings of fourth and 11th, respectively.

“Gardner, he’s a pretty good passer and very mobile,” Irish junior defensive lineman Stephon Tuitt said. “He can get out of the pocket and throw the ball very far, so we have to make sure we keep everything right and make sure everything goes good with him.”

In his first action of 2013, Gardner got the No. 17 Wolverines underway last week with a 59-9 romping over Central Michigan, rushing for 52 yards on seven attempts and throwing for 162 yards on 10-for-15 passing. It was not, however, an elite season debut for the quarterback, Michigan coach Brady Hoke said, as Gardner also threw two interceptions in the opener.

“I think sometimes guys who have that kind of ability,



Observer File Photo

Michigan receiver Devin Gardner watches the ball during Notre Dame’s 13-6 home victory last season. Gardner will start at quarterback Saturday.

sometimes it’s ... a blessing and a curse,” Hoke said. “And he can make a lot of plays and as long as he keeps learning ... punting the ball on fourth down is not a bad decision.”

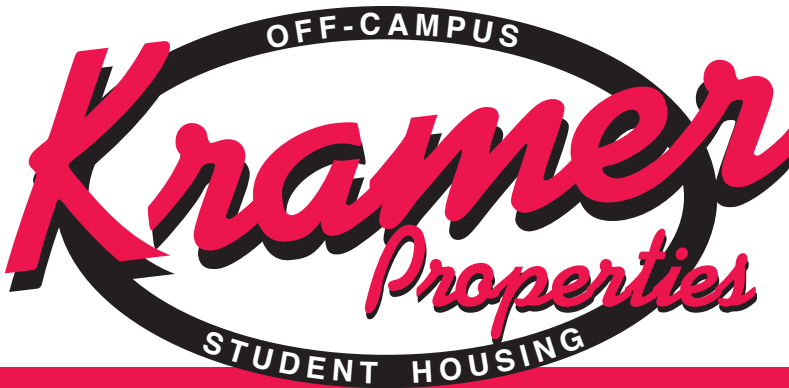
The matchup with the Irish provides a very public stage on which Gardner can prove he belongs as a big-time quarterback, an opportunity not lost

on the senior. “I’m really excited,” he said. “It’s a big game on the biggest stage in college football ... It’s what every quarterback dreams of — being on the big stage and being able to perform like this.”

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