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Connecticut 33, Notre Dame 30 (2 OT)

Broken record

Same old story as Irish lose another heartbreaker on Senior Day

By MIKE GOTIMER
Sports Writer

When former Yankees catcher Yogi Berra famously quipped "It's déjà vu all over again," who would have ever thought he could be talking about Notre Dame football?

Notre Dame lost on Senior Day to a Big East team with a losing record that had struggled through a season of adversity and was desperately looking for a signature win. Unfortunately for the Irish, it was the second year in a row that this nightmare scenario played out — this time with a 33-30 double-overtime loss to Connecticut capped by Andre Dixon's game-ending 4-yard touchdown run.

In 2008, Syracuse came into Notre Dame Stadium to spoil the last home game for Notre Dame's seniors a week after the Orange had announced head coach Greg Robinson would be fired at the season's end.

After Saturday's game, Huskies coach Randy Edsall called the win the biggest one in program history.

"We're just very, very proud to win and know that we have to stay humble and stay hungry because we still have other things that we still would like to accomplish," Edsall said. "But there is no doubt that this is the biggest win that we've had so far in the short time that we've been an FBS school."

It was also a much-needed win for a Connecticut team that had not won a game since the tragic death of junior cornerback Jasper Howard. The Huskies' win allows them to finally gain some closure now that they have honored their fallen teammate with a victory.

"It's just another game, but you've got to understand the human part of this, and you've got to understand what this team has gone through," Edsall said. "A couple of close games, and then you lose a teammate, you lose a brother, you lose a son, and you're trying so hard to honor him by winning on the field. We hadn't done that, so that first win that we were going to get was going to be special and what better place than here?"

For the Irish, head coach Charlie Weis once again found himself fielding questions from the hot seat after another Senior Day loss.



TOM LA/The Observer

From left, Irish players James Aldridge, George West, Kerry Neal and Darrin Walls sing the Alma Mater after Connecticut spoiled Notre Dame's Senior Day with a 33-30 victory in double overtime Saturday.

"I really feel miserable for those 33 guys," Weis said Saturday after the game. "And as I've said the other day and I've never been a hypocrite before, I come in here and start talking about me, I'm really barking up the wrong tree, because those guys are the guys I should feel for today."

It was a bitter feeling for Weis, who called last year's Senior Day loss to Syracuse a regret, having to face that reality for a second straight season.

"I feel miserable," he said. "No one cares more about these kids short term and long term than me. I don't worry about them just now, just today, or just next week. I worry about them and their lives, which is part of this job right here."

In the early going, it appeared that Notre Dame would pull away from the Huskies.

After holding Connecticut to a three-and-out on their first possession, the Irish marched 69 yards down the field and scored on

an 8-yard touchdown pass from junior quarterback Jimmy Clausen to junior wide receiver Golden Tate in just 3:11 to give Notre Dame a 7-0 lead. In the first quarter alone, the Irish outgained the Huskies 169-51.

Notre Dame capped off an 80-yard scoring drive just 28 seconds into the second quarter when Clausen got into the end zone on a 1-yard quarterback sneak to give the Irish a 14-0 lead.

But as they had done so many times this season, the Huskies bounced back on their next drive, as running back Jordan Todman took a 43-yard run to the house to finish off a scoring drive in which the Huskies went 75 yards in 2:41 to pull within a touchdown. A field goal by Huskies sophomore kicker Dave Teggart with 3:14 seconds left in the half put the score at 14-10.

After junior kicker David Ruffer kicked a 20-yard field goal to put the Irish back up by a touchdown early in the third quarter, Todman struck

again with a 96-yard kickoff return for a touchdown that evened the score 17-17.

The two defenses held until the Notre Dame offense was stifled in the red zone early in the fourth quarter, leading to a 23-yard field goal from Ruffer.

Connecticut marched deep into Irish territory on its ensuing possession, but junior linebacker Brian Smith intercepted a pass from Huskies junior and former Notre Dame quarterback Zach Frazer in the end zone.

The Huskies would get another chance after a stalled Notre Dame drive, and they tied the score 20-20 with 1:10 left in the game with a 29-yard field goal from Teggart. The field goal try came only after a pair of holding penalties negated Connecticut touchdown runs.

On the ensuing Irish possession, junior running back Armando Allen fumbled on the Notre Dame 41-yard line with 58 seconds left, giving the Huskies a shot to win the game in regulation. But

Teggart missed a 37-yard field goal try as time expired to force overtime.

The two teams traded touchdowns in the first overtime, and on its second overtime possession, Notre Dame settled for a 36-yard field goal by Ruffer before Dixon ran home the game winner.

With the loss, Notre Dame has now lost its last four games against Big East foes, with its last Big East win coming against Syracuse on Senior Day in 2005.

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player of the game

Jordan Todman
Connecticut running back

Todman rushed for 130 yards and a touchdown and returned a kickoff 96 yards for a score.

stat of the game

6

Number of points Notre Dame scored in regulation after taking a 14-0 lead with 14:32 remaining in the second quarter.

play of the game

Jordan Todman's 96-yard kickoff return touchdown in the third quarter

The special teams score tied the game 17-17 immediately after an Irish field goal made it 17-10.

quote of the game

"The finality of that being your last opportunity to play for the University of Notre Dame, I think it's gut wrenching."

Charlie Weis
Irish coach

report card

B+

quarterbacks: As usual, Clausen's numbers were phenomenal. But as the offense's leader, he deserves some of the blame for the unit's uninspiring finish.

B

running backs: Allen had a nice day with 170 total yards, but his fumble on Notre Dame's last drive in regulation gave the Huskies a shot at a makeable field goal.

A-

receivers: Tate and Floyd both registered at least 100 yards and a touchdown yet again, but the Connecticut defensive backs made big plays in critical situations.

B+

offensive line: Clausen was sacked twice and pressured in some critical situations, but the line paved the way for some good gains by Allen.

D

defensive line: The front four got man-handled in the critical fourth quarter, as the Huskies were able to physically dominate with a run-first attack.

C

linebackers: Brian Smith made a critical interception in the end zone, but the linebackers looked a step slow and out of position too often in the run game.

B-

defensive backs: The secondary contained Frazer for most of the day but allowed a touchdown pass on 3rd-and-9 in the first overtime.

B-

special teams: Ruffer made three big field goals and Turk looked solid in his return to punter. But the Irish gave up a kickoff return touchdown that changed the complexion of the game.

C-

coaching: The Irish came out firing on offense but inexplicably went away from the no-huddle approach that worked well in the first quarter, and the run defense looked lost at the end of the game.

2.59

overall: Another disheartening loss on a day when the Irish hoped to send their seniors out with a victory.

adding up the numbers

Number of November losses during the Charlie Weis era at Notre Dame. Weis is 10-10 in the season's final month in five seasons.

10

Number of Notre Dame games decided by seven points or less, the most in college football. The Irish are 4-5 in those contests.

Number of Notre Dame field goals in the red zone. The Irish scored on all six red zone possessions but managed only three touchdowns.

3

Number of games in which both Michael Floyd and Golden Tate recorded 100 yards receiving. The Irish are 0-4 in those games.

Number of yards the Irish offense amassed in the first quarter. Notre Dame also gained 163 yards in the third and totaled 452 total.

169

Number of consecutive starts by senior right tackle Sam Young, who broke Notre Dame's all-time record by starting Saturday.

Number of kickoff return yards for freshman Theo Riddick this season, a school record. He returned three kicks for 68 yards Saturday.

727

Number of 100-yard receiving games for Golden Tate this season, which ties a school record. He has 14 for his career, also a school record.



COURTNEY ECKERLE/The Observer

Irish senior center Eric Olsen and coach Charlie Weis prepare to take the field before Notre Dame's 33-30 double-overtime loss to Connecticut Saturday at Notre Dame Stadium.

Loss on Senior Day really hurts

Only being a junior, I didn't think the emotions of Notre Dame's Senior Day would get to me. But when Connecticut's Andre Dixon scampered into the end zone and handed five fifth-year seniors, including captains Kyle McCarthy and Scott Smith, their second straight Senior Day loss — well, it got to me.



Matt Gamber

Sports Editor

It wasn't just about the loss, which dropped the Irish to a shocking to some, disappointing to all 6-5 record this season, exactly where Notre Dame was a year ago. And while most Notre Dame fans are angry, to say the least, I can't help but just feel sad for the Notre Dame family, from the students and alumni to the players and coaches.

Some would argue that you can't hurt for Charlie Weis, a man paid millions to coach football at his alma mater and who, by most any statistical measure, hasn't lived up to expectations. But for all Weis' shortcomings — and they'll all be discussed over the next week or so, until an official announcement about the program's future is made at some point after Saturday's game at Stanford — I still have a great deal of respect for him.

Just after Weis' Sunday press conference, I happened across the 2005 ESPN video story on "Pass Right," when Weis famously stuck to a promise he made to a dying 10-year-old Irish fan to pass to the right on Notre Dame's first play against Washington, even though the Irish were backed up inside their own 1-yard line.

That was five years ago, just three games into the Weis era that seemed so full of promise. The contrast was stark between the Weis in the video — fresh, energetic, optimistic, well perceived — and the one who sat in front of the

media Sunday, appearing worn out, physically and emotionally, despite trying to take a light-hearted approach with the local beat writers before the press conference.

Weis has been the subject of as much pointed media speculation as any figure in the sports world in recent weeks, and it hurts to see that happen to a man who loves Notre Dame and has put so much into turning his program around.

Despite his disappointing win-loss record, the fact is he is still part of a Notre Dame family that prides itself on its closeness even in tough times, and this may be the toughest of times for Weis and his players. To hear the boo birds come out for the Band's traditional 1812 Overture — usually played as a tribute to Notre Dame's head coach — following the singing of the Alma Mater as the team, and particularly the seniors, slowly trickled into the locker room stung, for me at least, more than another close loss that, unfortunately, didn't come as a huge surprise.

No, Weis hasn't beaten USC in five tries. He's lost at home to Navy twice. He's lost two straight Senior Day games. His winning percentage is lower than those of both Bob Davie and Tyrone Willingham at the time they were fired.

Those damning statistics don't lie, and I can no longer believe he could, should or would be retained. While he's taken the right tact with the media by politely declining to answer those loaded "big picture" questions until after the season, I'm not sure I believe him when he says he hasn't reflected on the program's progress and how it affects his job status.

No, I haven't believed in a lot of the moves Weis has made this season, and I don't believe a lot of what he's said as the pressure turned up in recent weeks. But when he says he'll continue to prepare for Stanford, I believe him. When he says he'll continue to recruit "full speed ahead" until he's told he's not coming back, I

believe him. And when he says he cares most about his players in these uncertain times, I believe him.

Charlie Weis is a good man. He is a Notre Dame man. And, perhaps even more importantly, his players, and especially his seniors, are Notre Dame men. It is admirable the way they have stood by their embattled coach over the last three tumultuous years, and the way in which the team emerged from the tunnel Saturday — standing behind their four captains and their head coach, both literally and figuratively — made me proud to support this team, even if the final result didn't.

Just as the struggles of Notre Dame's players in certain areas of the game — an inconsistent ground game and poor tackling fundamentals come to mind — are a reflection of their head coach, so too is the way with which these players carried themselves before and after what might have been the most painful loss for a group of players who have endured more than their fair share of painful losses.

Of course I wish the offensive line played a little nastier, the linebackers tackled much better and the defensive backs were more aggressive with the ball in the air. Those are only three examples of concerns and criticisms any casual observers of this Irish team would make, and, fairly or unfairly, those ultimately fall on the shoulders of the head coach, as Weis acknowledged Sunday.

But if you listened to the seniors talk about their Notre Dame experience leading up to their final game in the Stadium, and if you watched the pain with which so many of them lingered on the field after this gut-wrenching defeat, you know these guys have given it all they could. And so has their coach.

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

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Third straight loss comes as shock



TOM LA/The Observer

Senior fullback James Aldridge stands on the field after Notre Dame's 33-30 loss to Connecticut in double overtime Saturday. The Irish have now lost three straight after a 6-2 start put Notre Dame in BCS contention.

By LAURA MYERS
Sports Writer

There was no snow this time, but the rest seemed eerily familiar.

The collapse of a promising season came to a climax Saturday with an emotional Senior Day loss to a Big East team. And just like after the 2008 loss to Syracuse, players are trying to figure out what went wrong.

"It's just tough," junior wide receiver Golden Tate said. "Sitting at 6-2 you know we had a chance to do some special things, and then it's just all taken from you."

In 2008, Notre Dame sat at 5-2 before ultimately losing four of its last five. It was a disappointing finish for a team that was trying to prove itself after the disastrous 2007 season.

This season, the stakes

were even higher. At 6-2, the Irish were ranked and had a chance to play in a BCS bowl. Now, after three straight losses the Irish will most likely not even have a shot at the Gator Bowl, which many had termed a fallback for this year's squad.

"I would've laughed in your face if you had told me this is what would happen," senior safety Kyle McCarthy said.

The losses were games seven, eight and nine decided by a touchdown or less in 2009. Players pointed to the close decisions in their search for an explanation.

"Just losing by very little, those are the tough ones,"

junior quarterback Jimmy Clausen said. "You know, it's just really hard to swallow."

Added Tate: "Playing close games, at some point it happens, unfortunately."

Tate and Clausen have both put up big numbers in the losses, but with nothing to show for it. In the last three games, Tate has notched 368 receiving yards, and Clausen is 94-of-138 passing for 1,064 yards. Statistics like that don't usually lend themselves to three straight losses, but Clausen said that is beside the point.

"Stats really don't matter unless you get a W at the

end," Clausen said.

Even though the Senior Day loss looked similar to last year's, the Irish will now look to conclude the regular season differently.

"We can't point fingers. We can only point back at ourselves," McCarthy said.

Last year, Notre Dame traveled to USC for its last game and took a beating in an ugly 38-3 loss.

This year, the Irish will again head to California, but this time to take on a hot Stanford team. Still, they're hoping for a different result.

"The guys are just hanging their heads, but we still have one game left and need to keep moving," junior linebacker Brian Smith said. "Losing wears on you, but you have to work to not let it wear on you and just work to win."

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"Sitting at 6-2 you know we had a chance to do some special things, and then it's just all taken from you."

Golden Tate
Irish wide receiver

Tate sets pair of school receiving records

By MIKE GOTIMER
Sports Writer

Junior wide receiver Golden Tate set two new school receiving records in the loss to Connecticut. With his 39-yard reception in the first quarter, Tate passed Jeff Samardzija's previous record of 1,249 receiving yards from the 2005 season, and, at the end of the game, he had 1,295 yards on the year.

On the same catch, Tate passed both Samardzija and Tom Gatewood's shared record of 77 receptions in a single season, and he currently has 83 catches on the year.

◆ Walk-on junior kicker David Ruffer found out that he would start at kicker just before kickoff on Saturday after freshman

kicker Nick Tausch was scratched from the game.

"It was right before the series went off that I found out I was going to start," Ruffer said. "I misheard the coin flip and thought we were going to take the ball, so I started kicking field goals. [Junior kicker] Brandon Walker had to yell at me to kickoff."

◆ Huskies junior quarterback Zach Frazer walked away victorious yesterday in his return to Notre Dame Stadium.

Frazer, who was a freshman on the Irish roster in 2006, transferred to

Connecticut before the 2007 season after finishing fourth in the quarterback competition to replace Brady Quinn. After the game however, Frazer downplayed the individual significance of the win.

"I don't feel like I proved anything. I feel like we proved something today, you know, coming in here and getting a victory."

Zach Frazer
Huskies quarterback

coach Charlie Weis' record at Notre Dame dropped to 35-26, for a winning percentage of .574, below the winning percentages of former

Irish coaches Bob Davie and Tyrone Willingham. Weis' home winning percentage of .576 ranks as the worst home winning percentage amongst all Notre Dame coaches since 1975.

◆ Notre Dame's red zone offense struggled once again to put the ball in the endzone, converting only three touchdowns in six red zone appearances, including in overtime. Going back to the Navy game, the Irish have scored just seven touchdowns in 14 trips to the red zone. In their seven combined red zone chances in the Navy and Pittsburgh games, the Irish have converted three field goals, committed three turnovers and missed one field goal.

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scoring summary

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	OT	Total
Connecticut	0	10	7	3	13	33
Notre Dame	7	7	3	3	10	30

First quarter

Notre Dame 7, Connecticut 0
Golden Tate 8-yd pass from Jimmy Clausen (David Ruffer kick) with 10:59 remaining.
Drive: 9 plays, 69 yards, 3:11 elapsed.

Second quarter

Notre Dame 14, Connecticut 0
Clausen 1-yd run (Ruffer kick) with 14:32 remaining.
Drive: 11 plays, 80 yards, 5:05 elapsed.

Notre Dame 14, Connecticut 7
Jordan Todman 43-yd run (Dave Teggart kick) with 11:51 remaining.
Drive: 7 plays, 75 yards, 2:41 elapsed.

Third quarter

Notre Dame 17, Connecticut 10
Ruffer 20-yd field goal with 9:29 remaining.
Drive: 11 plays, 77 yards, 5:31 elapsed.

Fourth quarter

Notre Dame 20, Connecticut 17
Todman 96-yd kickoff return (Teggart kick) with 9:17 remaining.
Drive: 11 plays, 41 yards, 5:32 elapsed.

First overtime

Connecticut 27, Notre Dame 20
Kashif Moore 11-yd pass from Zach Frazer (Teggart kick).

Connecticut 27, Notre Dame 27
Michael Floyd 4-yd pass from Clausen (Ruffer kick).

Second overtime

Notre Dame 30, Connecticut 27
Ruffer 36-yd field goal.

Connecticut 33, Notre Dame 30
Andre Dixon 4-yd run.

statistics

total yards

ND	452
UConn	372

rushing yards

ND	123
UConn	231

passing yards

ND	329
UConn	141

time of possession

ND	33:08
UConn	26:52

passing

Clausen	30-45-329	Frazer	12-25-141
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rushing

Allen	24-106	Todman	26-130
Tate	1-12	Dixon	20-114

receiving

Tate	9-123	Easley	4-67
Floyd	8-104	Griffin	3-33
Allen	7-64	Moore	2-13



ANDREW WEBER/The Observer



TOM LA/The Observer

A familiar story

Notre Dame reversed its recent trend of struggling to start games, but the Irish could not sustain their early momentum and lost their third straight game, 33-30 to Connecticut in double overtime. Jimmy Clausen marched the offense down the field on its first drive, finding Golden Tate for an 8-yard touchdown pass and a 7-0 lead. On the second play of the second quarter, Clausen plunged in from one yard out to put Notre Dame up 14-0. A 43-yard

Jordan Todman touchdown run and a Dave Teggart field goal brought Connecticut to within 14-10. On their first drive of the second half, the Irish moved deep into Huskies territory but settled for a David Ruffer field goal — which Todman immediately answered with a 96-yard kickoff return touchdown to tie the game at 17-17. After trading fourth-quarter field goals, the teams headed into overtime, as both Connecticut and Notre Dame scored on touchdown passes on their first drive. But after the Huskies forced the Irish to settle for a field goal in the second overtime, Andre Dixon ended the game with a 4-yard touchdown scamper to give Connecticut the 33-30 win.

For more photos, check out the photo gallery at ndsmcoobserver.com



ANDREW WEBER/The Observer



TOM LA/The Observer



TOM LA/The Observer

Clockwise from top: Junior running back Armando Allen has his helmet knocked off as he attempts to cross the goal line; junior quarterback Jimmy Clausen passes to Allen; senior center Eric Olsen runs out of the tunnel before the game; Allen tries to escape a tackler; junior linebacker Harrison Smith dives to make a tackle.