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Notre Dame 56, Navy 14

Sailing past Navy

Lockdown defense and dynamic running game lead Irish to 56-14 victory over Navy

By SAM GANS
Sports Writer

The Irish faced a tumultuous seven days prior to their game against Navy on Saturday. Notre Dame lost to its archrival the previous week, senior starting defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore suffered a season-ending detached MCL and Irish coach Brian Kelly apologized to his team Friday for comments he made to the media the day before. Yet despite these potential challenges and distractions, the Irish (5-3) rolled to a dominating 56-14 win over the Midshipmen (2-6).

A well-balanced offensive attack led the way for Notre Dame, as the Irish accumulated 260 passing yards and 182 rushing yards, finishing with a final advantage of 442-229 in total yards.

The Irish started the game quickly when sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees hit senior receiver Michael Floyd on Notre Dame's first play from scrimmage on a quick pass which Floyd turned into a 25-yard gain. Senior running back Jonas Gray eventually capped the opening 70-yard drive with a 4-yard touchdown run.

On Notre Dame's next possession, Rees again opened the drive with a pass for big yardage when junior receiver Theo Riddick took a screen for 37 yards. Junior running back Cierre Wood ended the drive by scoring on a 1-yard sweep to give the Irish a 14-0 lead after the first quarter.

"We felt in the first couple of drives. It was important to get off to a good start after not getting off to a good start against USC," Kelly said. "We scripted some plays out, some plays that we wanted to and we were able to get to them and have some success early on."

Gray finished the day with 69 yards on 12 carries and three scores, while Wood ran the ball 11 times for 66 yards and two touchdowns, after the duo combined for just 43 yards on nine carries in the loss to USC a week earlier.

While Gray and Wood ran the ball hard, Gray was willing to give enormous credit for the success the backs had to the offensive line for creating holes.

"[The offensive line] manhandled the guys up front," Gray said. "We talked during the week about breaking the wheel with our toughness. We knew it started up front. Those guys were hungry to get us to run the ball."

After an Irish turnover early in the second quarter set Navy



TOM LA/The Observer

Irish senior receiver Michael Floyd runs past a Navy defender during Saturday's game. Floyd finished the game with six catches for 121 yards, including a 56-yard touchdown catch from sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees.

up with strong field position, the Midshipmen were able to cut the deficit to 14-7 when sophomore quarterback Trey Miller found junior running back Gee Gee Greene in the end zone on a 9-yard touchdown pass.

But the Irish didn't take long to bring the margin back to 14 points. On the first play of the following drive, Floyd, who finished with six receptions for 121 yards, broke behind the Navy secondary and caught a 56-yard touchdown.

"The safety bit and I was wide open on the post," Floyd said. "I was surprised [at how open I was]."

The ensuing kickoff from freshman kicker Kyle Brindza fell uncaught and was kicked near the Navy 20-yard line, eventually being recovered by freshman linebacker Troy Niklas at the 22-yard line. Four plays later, Gray added a 2-yard touchdown run to make the score 28-7 with 9:07 remaining in the first half.

The Irish entered the half up 35-7 when Wood added his second 1-yard touchdown run of the game with 3:37 left in the

second quarter.

While the Irish offense had a strong first half, the defense was equally effective, limiting Navy to 100 yards of offense after the first 30 minutes thanks in large part to junior linebacker Manti Te'o's seven first-half tackles, including 1.5 for a loss.

"Manti is going to make plays when he gets the chance to make plays," senior safety and captain Harrison Smith said. "He has such a nose for the ball."

The score became 42-7 when Floyd caught a lateral from Rees for a 10-yard touchdown run with 2:59 left in the third quarter. Gray scored his third and final touchdown of the game to make the score 49-7 with 13:38 left in the contest.

After Navy sophomore quarterback Jarvis Cummings scored on a 12-yard touchdown run, Irish senior quarterback Dayne Crist entered the game for the final Notre Dame drive. Crist went 3-for-3 on the drive, which ended when freshman running back George Atkinson ran in the game's final score.

"It was great to see [Crist] out there," Rees said. "He's

been through a couple of tough times, but to see him bounce back like that and go down the field, I feel great for him."

While the Irish cruised to victory, it didn't appear it would be so easy after a potentially divisive comment by Kelly when meeting with the media Thursday.

"You can see the players that I have recruited, you know who they are," Kelly said Thursday. "We've had one class of kids that we've recruited that I've had my hand on. The other guys here are coming along. It's a process. It can't happen overnight. They're getting it. They're making good progress."

Following a series of responses on Twitter from some of the team's upperclassmen, Kelly apologized in a team meeting Friday.

Any division in the locker room appeared unnoticeable Saturday, and Kelly said he and the team have moved on.

"I can tell you that as a family, we all have good days and bad days," Kelly said after the game, "and you work through that as a family."

"But at the end, like all families, if there's a disagreement, if there's any kind of need to communicate, it needs to get done and we did that. We communicated with each other as a team and as a family and you saw it today. You saw a team that played together."

Smith reiterated the team — the family — has moved past Thursday's controversy.

"When you have a family environment, when guys all buy into, 'One team, one cause, one family,' things like that don't break us up," Smith said. "They don't get us off track. If anything, they bring us together. That kind of showed itself by what we did on the field today."

As the Irish look toward next Saturday's game at Wake Forest, they look to continue fostering that family atmosphere and strong all-around production as they did against Navy.

"Our big players played big," Kelly said. "[We] controlled the line of scrimmage and played great defense. It's a good recipe for success."

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player of the game

Jonas Gray
Notre Dame running back

Gray led a dominant Notre Dame rushing attack, rolling up three of the seven touchdowns the Irish scored on the ground.

stat of the game

100 first-half yards

Notre Dame limited the normally prolific Navy offense to just 100 yards in the first half and a season-low 229 yards in the game.

play of the game

Linebacker Troy Niklas' second-quarter fumble recovery on a Notre Dame kickoff

Just after Michael Floyd put the Irish back up by 14, Niklas' recovery opened the floodgates for a total rout.

quote of the game

"We communicated with a each other as a team and as a family and you saw it today. You saw a team that played together."

Brian Kelly
Irish coach

report card

- B+** **quarterbacks:** Tommy Rees had a much better day than last weekend, though he was not asked to do much. Rees still missed a few open receivers and accounted for two bad turnovers.
- A-** **running backs:** Anytime the backfield scores six rushing touchdowns, it has done a great job. Completing screen passes is not as difficult as the Irish sometimes make it seem.
- A-** **receivers:** Michael Floyd rebounded spectacularly, and the receivers found plenty of open space. It would have been nice to see Theo Riddick display a little more top-end speed.
- A** **offensive line:** From the first drive to the last one, the offensive line manhandled the Midshipmen. The Irish completely controlled the line of scrimmage, and it showed.
- A** **defensive line:** Missing its two senior ends, the defensive line stepped up in a big way. The young guns played smart, disciplined football in one of the toughest situations they could have faced.
- A-** **linebackers:** Other than missing a pass coverage or two, the linebackers helped completely shut down the Navy attack in a very disciplined, smart and physical effort.
- A** **defensive backs:** Gary Gray, Harrison Smith and Robert Blanton were excellent against the run. The triple option attack simply never found the corner — or any other room, for that matter.
- A-** **special teams:** George Atkinson had a number of great returns, and Ben Turk's one punt was solid. Can someone please explain why the punt-block and return unit is so very mediocre?
- A-** **coaching:** Bob Diaco had his defense ready to play, and Brian Kelly clearly brought his team together after a trying week. The only sore spot was not seeing Andrew Hendrix get any snaps.

3.74 **overall:** The Irish responded to the USC loss with one of their best performances all season. Frankly, this team should play like this more often.

adding up the numbers

After averaging 6.1 yards per carry in last year's contest, Navy was held to just 3.9 yards per rush Saturday. **3.9**

7 Notre Dame scored seven rushing touchdowns Saturday, the most by an Irish squad since 1992.

Navy fullback Alexander Teich could not replicate his 210-yard 2010 performance, mustering just 62 yards. **62**

5 Notre Dame senior running back Jonas Gray has scored a touchdown in five straight contests.

Navy's two scoring drives totaled 56 yards, as both came off Irish turnovers. **56**

24 The Irish defense held 24 of Navy's 50 rushing attempts to two yards or less, including six attempts for losses.



GRANT TOBIN/The Observer

Offensive guard Trevor Robinson, left, and offensive tackle Zack Martin congratulate each other after the Irish scored a rushing touchdown Saturday. Notre Dame totaled seven scores on the ground.

The Irish came together — but why?

It was a perfect combination of elegance and power, finesse and utter dominance.

Navy coach Ken Niumatalolo called it a “full butt-whipping,” the worst outcome in his years facing the Irish.

Perhaps more than anything else, Notre Dame's 56-14 victory over Navy, a team that has given the Irish fits in their previous four matchups, was a welcome reminder of the sheer talent brimming on Notre Dame's roster.

The defense shined, as an underwhelming Midshipmen team was held to just 196 yards on the ground, well below its average of 325 yards coming into the contest. Give credit to the front seven, particularly defensive linemen Sean Cwynar and Stephon Tuitt, for blowing up the option before it could even develop.

And then there was Manti Te'o. The junior linebacker tallied 13 tackles, five unassisted, and played some of the most disciplined football of his career. He could not be blocked, misdirected or out-schemed, turning the Navy option on its head.

On the other side of the ball, the offense executed Brian Kelly's game plan to near-perfection. A collected Tommy Rees threw for 237 yards and one touchdown, Michael Floyd

caught two touchdowns and the Irish running attack continued its unprecedented success en route to 182 yards and seven touchdowns.

The running back combo of Jonas Gray and Cierre Wood (I like “Smash and Dash,” but I'm open to suggestions) tallied 135 yards and five touchdowns alone. The duo have become one of the best one-two punches in Division I football, a la Mark Ingram and Trent Richardson of the 2010 Alabama squad.

In all facets of the game, Notre Dame played together as a unified unit. But the question remains: unified by what?

Kelly's post-practice comments last Thursday quickly erupted into a mess of tweets, media speculation, accusations, general confusion, censorship and apology. His choice of words was interpreted by many as a general criticism of former head coach Charlie Weis' recruits on the current Notre Dame roster.

Despite the removal of controversial tweets per the usual situation sterilization, we do know players were visibly upset and confused by Kelly's comments.

We do know those same players contributed to an inspiring performance Saturday, leaving no doubt in anyone's mind that Weis' recruits can play Kelly's brand of football.

We also know Kelly refers to his team as both a “family” and the football program as a “business,” per Saturday's post-game comments. I'm not sure the two can coexist. If football is a business, are the players just employees? Are the fans shareholders? If so, was leaving Cincinnati on the eve of the biggest moment in

those student-athletes' lives just a business decision by Dad?

But perhaps Kelly's most revealing action Saturday was the one that went unnoticed — naming senior Chris Salvi a gameday captain. A walk-on and a non-scholarship athlete, Salvi cannot attribute his presence on the roster to the recruiting efforts of Weis or Kelly. Rather, his passion for Notre Dame and football earned him a place on the team and the 50-yard line Saturday. The decision, a move senior safety Harrison Smith called “awesome,” was well-received by the entire team.

Kelly never intended to stereotype the vast majority of the Irish roster, playmakers that start at nearly every position. Frustration flowing from a dismal performance against the Trojans can exasperate anyone, even a head coach.

Both players and coach have expressed they have moved past the issue as a family, and I believe them. The Irish played as a selfless, unified front against the Midshipmen in a dominating performance.

Notre Dame's de facto elimination from BCS contention was a shot in the heart for many Irish fans. But with nothing but pride on the line, the remaining four contests of the season still hold tremendous value if they can answer one question: are the Irish playing unified under Kelly, Notre Dame or themselves?

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

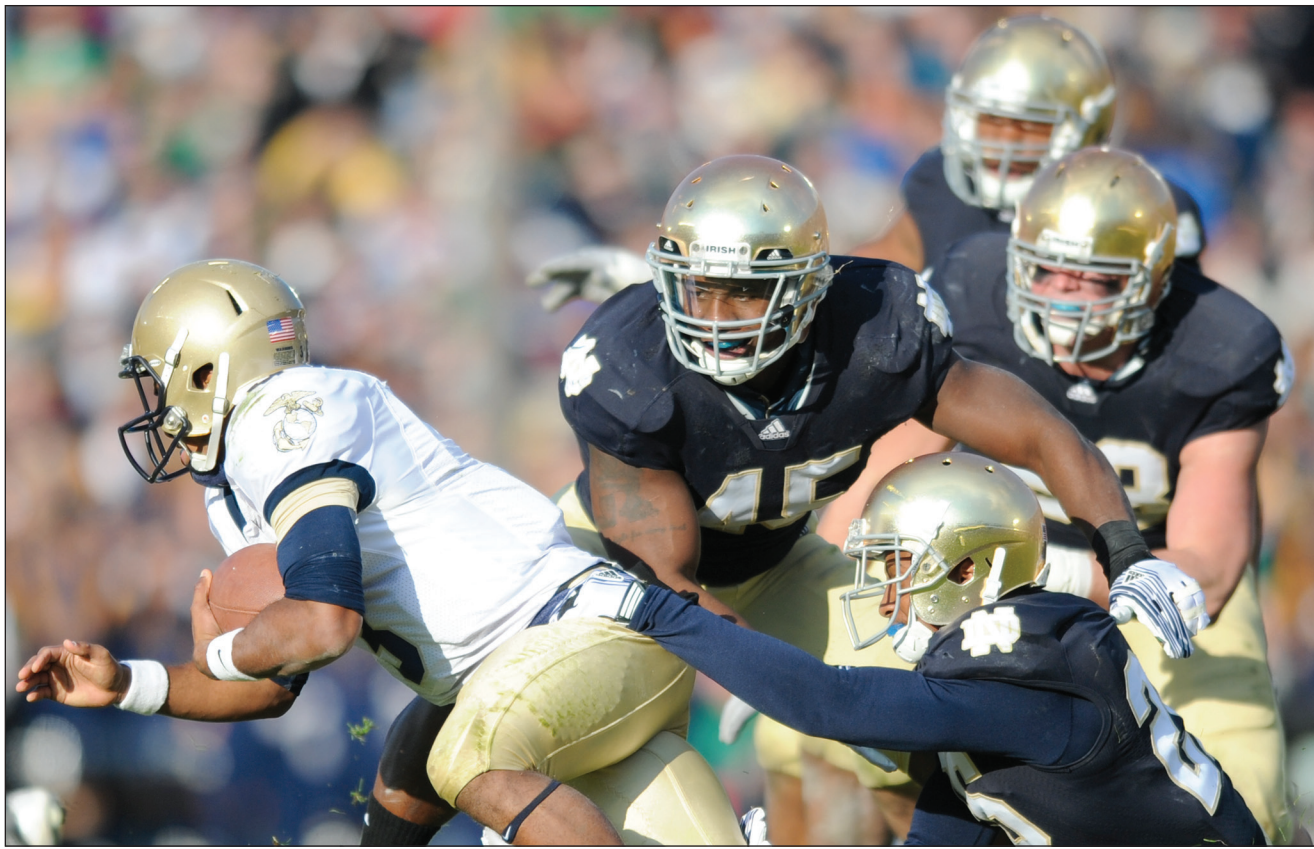


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Irish shut down Navy triple option



TOM LA/The Observer

Irish senior safety Jamoris Slaughter and senior linebacker Darius Fleming take down Navy quarterback Trey Miller. Notre Dame limited Navy's offense to a season-low 229 yards.

By JACK HEFFERON
Sports Writer

For 43 years, it was pretty simple: Notre Dame scheduled Navy, and Notre Dame beat Navy. Starting in 2007 though, the Midshipmen and their option attack upset the balance of power by taking three of four victories from the Irish, averaging 31 points and 287 rushing yards a game.

The most egregious of those Irish losses occurred last year at New Meadowlands Stadium, when the option burned the Irish for 367 yards on the ground as Navy cruised to a 35-17 victory. After that loss, questions about Notre Dame's ability to stop the triple option lingered, even after they handily defeated both Army and Air Force.

After Saturday's dominant 56-14 win over the Midshipmen though, Irish coach Brian Kelly believes those doubts can finally be forgotten. "A great victory for our football team today against a team in Navy that has been very difficult for us to defend, obviously," Kelly said. "And I think we can put that to rest about our ability to defend a very, very good offensive football team."

Especially cathartic for Notre Dame was its ability to stop Navy from running the ball up the middle. After allowing senior fullback Alexander Teich 210 yards rushing last year almost exclusively between the tackles, the Irish defense was able to plug the middle and hold Teich to just 66 yards on the ground.

"Our front was outstanding," Kelly

said. "Our two inside guys didn't give much. You are not going to talk a lot about them, [freshman defensive end Stephon] Tuitt and [junior defensive tackle Sean] Cwynar, but they were really good inside. They took the fullback away and forced the ball out on the perimeter. Those two guys played very well."

The defensive line was indeed the key to stopping Navy on Saturday, even without its two most experienced players. Senior Kapron Lewis-Moore suffered a season-ending MCL injury against Air Force, and senior Ethan Johnson was a ruled out as a game-time decision. In their absence, Kelly had to rely heavily on the inexperienced tandem of Tuitt and sophomore nose guard Louis Nix, and the two answered the bell.

"[Tuitt and Nix], those are the guys that are going to stop the fullback and keep the linebackers free," senior captain Harrison Smith said. "That might not end up on the stat sheet and they might not get the tackles, but they created the tackles. They created the tackles for loss and the big stops."

And with Navy's offensive line occupied, junior linebacker Manti Te'o was free to create chaos and disrupt the Midshipmen's offensive flow. Te'o registered 13 tackles on the day, including three tackles for loss.

According to Kelly, it was Te'o's ability to make the right reads and stick to his assignments that allowed the junior linebacker to constantly fly to the ballcarrier.

"Manti played well," he said. "He's very disciplined. Obviously he was in

a position where he had to play [the running] back and QB, and he wasn't guessing. He was very disciplined today and played a solid game."

And on the other side of the ball, Midshipmen coach Ken Niumatalolo was at a loss on how to scheme against or contain his fellow Hawaiian.

"The difference for us offensively against their defense was Manti," Niumatalolo said. "We could not block Manti. We have been doing this for a long time. We tried a lot of different schemes and tried a lot of things to block him, but the kid played phenomenal."

With the defensive front forcing the ball outside and Te'o and company suffocating the run on the perimeter, the Irish were finally able to shut down the option and, for the time being, silence their doubters. While that would be plenty enough for some teams, the Irish look to improve further against Wake Forest this weekend.

"That's always our goal, is to shut people's rushing game down, but we'll watch tape and say we could have held them to less," Smith said. "We just always want more, and as well as we did today, we're going to come in tomorrow and we're going to say, 'Man, we could have had an even better of a day.'"

"This was one week, and we got it done this week. But we have a game next week, and we've got to move forward."

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Gray records big day on ground

By JACK HEFFERON
Sports Writer

Senior running back Jonas Gray scored three touchdowns on Saturday, becoming the first Notre Dame player to rush for three scores since Travis Thomas accomplished the feat against Navy in 2007 and the first to do so in a non-overtime game since Darius Walker in the 2006 Fiesta Bowl against Ohio State. After failing to run for a touchdown in his first 25 collegiate games, Gray has scored in each of his last five games for the Irish. The last Notre Dame running back to score a rushing touchdown in five consecutive games was Ryan Grant, who scored in six straight games in 2002.

Notre Dame scores on the ground

Both Gray and junior running back Cierre Wood rushed for a pair of touchdowns in the first half alone. The last time Notre Dame had two running backs rush for multiple touchdowns in a 34-24 victory over West Virginia in 2001, when Julius Jones and Tony Fisher each had two scores. Notre Dame's seven rushing touchdowns marked the most running scores the Irish have compiled in a single game since a 48-0 shutout of Purdue in 1997, when they also totaled seven.

Blowout victory

The 56 points scored by Notre Dame was the most it has scored on a Navy defense since its 58-24 win in 1994.

The 42-point margin of victory was the largest in the series since 1987, when the Irish defeated the Midshipmen by the score 56-13.

Rees ties, then breaks own record

Entering Saturday's game, sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees' longest career completion was a 37-yard toss. He tied that mark in the first quarter when he found junior wide receiver Theo Riddick for 37 yards. In the second quarter, Rees hit senior wide receiver Michael Floyd between the safeties for a 56-yard touchdown to break the record.

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scoring summary

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total
Navy	0	7	0	7	14
ND	14	21	7	14	56

First quarter

Notre Dame 7, Navy 0
Jonas Gray 4-yd run (David Ruffer kick) with 4:52 remaining
Drive: 5 plays, 70 yards, 2:14 elapsed

Notre Dame 14, Navy 0

Cierre Wood 1-yd run (David Ruffer kick) with 0:31 remaining
Drive: 6 plays, 63 yards, 2:24 elapsed

Second quarter

Notre Dame 14, Navy 7
Gee Gee Greene 9-yd pass from Trey Miller (Jon Teague kick) with 11:06 remaining
Drive: 6 plays, 27 yards, 2:42 elapsed

Notre Dame 21, Navy 7

Michael Floyd 56-yd pass from Tommy Rees (David Ruffer kick) with 10:51 remaining
Drive: 1 play, 56 yards, 0:22 elapsed

Notre Dame 28, Navy 7

Jonas Gray 2-yd run (David Ruffer kick) with 9:07 remaining
Drive: 4 plays, 22 yards, 1:37 elapsed

Notre Dame 35, Navy 7

Cierre Wood 1-yd run (David Ruffer kick) with 3:37 remaining
Drive: 10 plays, 56 yards, 3:59 elapsed

Third quarter

Notre Dame 42, Navy 7
Michael Floyd 10-yd run (David Ruffer kick) with 2:59 remaining
Drive: 9 plays, 86 yards, 4:23 elapsed

Fourth quarter

Notre Dame 49, Navy 7
Jonas Gray 5-yd run (David Ruffer kick) with 13:38 remaining
Drive: 5 plays, 43 yards, 2:03 elapsed

Notre Dame 49, Navy 14

Jarvis Cummings 12-yd run (Jon Teague kick) with 9:25 remaining
Drive: 2 plays, 26 yards, 0:34 elapsed

Notre Dame 56, Navy 14

George Atkinson 1-yd run (David Ruffer kick) with 3:49 remaining
Drive: 10 plays, 53 yards, 5:36 elapsed

statistics

rushing yards



passing yards



time of possession



	passing	rushing
Rees	16-22-237 Miller	5-13-33
Gray	12-69 Teich	15-62



NICOLE TOCZAUER/The Observer



GRANT TOBIN/The Observer

Bouncing back

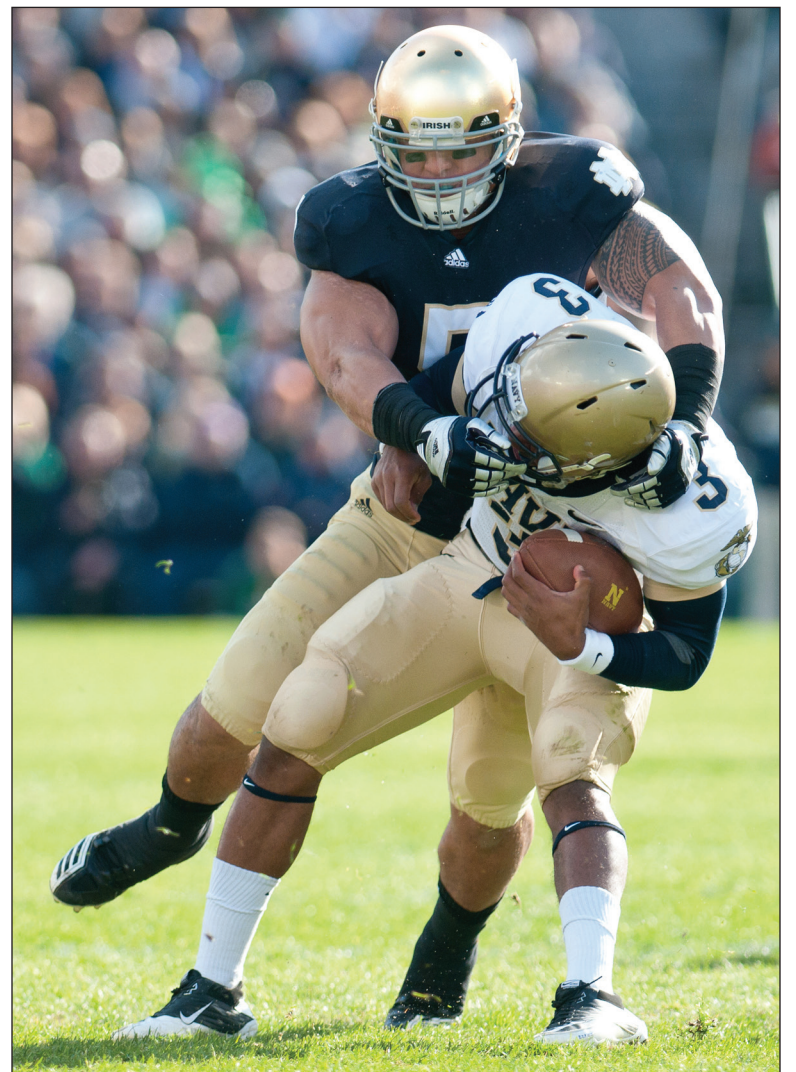
After dropping an emotional contest to USC and after a tumultuous week off the field, the Irish rebounded in powerful fashion Saturday, jumping out to an early lead against the Midshipmen and never looking back. Despite missing senior defensive ends Kapron Lewis-Moore and Ethan Johnson due to injuries, the Notre Dame defense stuffed the Navy triple-option attack that had given the Irish nightmares in three of the past four contests. With seven touchdowns on the ground and another through the air, Notre Dame cruised to an easy victory and improved to 5-3 on the season.



TOM LA/The Observer



TOM LA/The Observer



GRANT TOBIN/The Observer

Clockwise from top: Irish running back George Atkinson crosses into the end zone; tight end Tyler Eifert dives for more yardage; running back Cierre Wood fights off a Navy defender; linebacker Manti Te'o takes down a Navy runner; receiver Michael Floyd holds onto the ball while being tackled.