

# IRISH INSIDER

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Notre Dame 24, Wake Forest 17

## Wake-up call

*A defensive adjustment and a power running game lead the Irish to a 24-17 victory*

By ALLAN JOSEPH  
Sports Editor

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — Against a brand-new opponent in the smallest venue Notre Dame had played in since 1945, everything seemed different for the Irish. Yet it was a familiar statement that spurred Notre Dame (6-3) to a 24-17 victory over Wake Forest on a chilly night in BB&T Field.

“[Irish coach Brian] Kelly talked about it at halftime: playing like champions,” senior running back Jonas Gray said. “Champions grind out. They have grind-out games where everything may not be going the right way and you come together as a team and you can count on each other to make adjustments and get the victory.”

While the Demon Deacons (5-4) gave the Irish all they could handle in front of the over-capacity crowd of 36,307, Notre Dame battled back in a manner that pleased Kelly and adhered to his mantra.

“We have a sign that says ‘Play Like A Champion,’ and to play like a champion, you have to play consistently,” Kelly said. “You can’t have spurts. Tonight was a great step in that direction.”

Sophomore Wake Forest quarterback Tanner Price led the Deacons to a hot start on the opening possession, finding open receiver after open receiver on the way to an early 7-0 lead.

“I just think they executed very well,” Kelly said. “They attacked some things and we had to make some adjustments to it. They are a well-coached football team.”

While the Irish would battle back and tie the game at 10-10 at the end of the first quarter, Wake Forest was able to seize a 17-10 lead less than 30 seconds before halftime on the strength of a two-yard scoring plunge from running back Josh Harris.

At halftime, however, Kelly and the coaching staff made a number of adjustments that would prove timely in the second half, as Harris’ touchdown and the ensuing extra point would be the last points the Deacons would earn all game.

“Our coaches do a great job of making adjustments and settling the guys down,” Kelly said. “We’re working hard at halftime. There’s a lot going on and I just think we do a pretty good job as a staff of getting our guys focused on what needs to happen in the third



EILEEN VEIHMAYER/The Observer

**Irish senior cornerback Robert Blanton and senior running back Jonas Gray celebrate during Notre Dame’s 24-17 win over Wake Forest on Saturday. It was the first-ever meeting between the schools.**

quarter.”

One of those adjustments was a renewed focus on a smashmouth running game, as the Irish ran the ball 22 times in the second half for 105 yards.

“The coaches did a great job making adjustments in the second half, just sticking to the stuff that worked,” Gray said. “When it came down to it, short-yardage situations, they put it in my hands, [and] the linemen did a great job blocking up front.”

“We knew we had to be physical in the second half.”

That mentality paid off as Notre Dame scored on each of its first two possessions in the second half, retaking control of the contest and never looking back. In doing so, Notre Dame established the final 24-17 margin of victory.

“[That was] huge. It just gets the momentum back,” Irish sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees said. “It put our defense in a position where we weren’t playing from behind.”

Wake Forest had an opportunity to knot the game back up when Rees threw an inter-

ception on a “flea-flicker” trick play designed to find senior receiver Michael Floyd downfield.

“It’s kind of hit-or-miss sometimes, but I’ve got to do better than that,” Rees said.

The Deacons’ threat was short-lived, as just three plays later, senior safety Harrison Smith forced a fumble recovered by senior cornerback Gary Gray.

“Our defense came up and made a huge play for us,” Rees said. “That was kind of a turning point in the game.”

Kelly said he was encouraged by that sequence of plays, as the turnovers that have so often cost the Irish this year did not do so this week.

“We can overcome those things,” Kelly said. “It’s the mistakes that we’ve had in the red zone, the fumbling the football, and those things. We did not beat ourselves today.”

After struggling to contain Price and the Wake Forest aerial attack in the first quarter, the Notre Dame defense shut the Deacons out in the second half, aided in large part by a switch from a base 3-4 defense

to a nickel package.

“They completed some passes, but we kept the ball in front of us and didn’t give up the big play,” Kelly said. “[We] made it very difficult for Wake Forest to run, and then it became, for us, the ability to get after the quarterback, so we knew the ball was going to be thrown.”

As the Irish took a one-possession lead into the fourth quarter, Kelly went to the ground, calling runs on 14 of Notre Dame’s 15 fourth-quarter plays to grind out the game.

“It’s who we are and this football team obviously takes on an identity,” Kelly said. “They’ve run the ball effectively all year. Again, when you’re on the road and you’re playing good competition, you’ve got to close the game out and we did a great job closing it out running the ball.”

Senior center Mike Golic Jr., who entered the game after senior center Braxton Cave left with an injury, said he and his fellow offensive linemen enjoyed closing the game out.

“The O-linemen always want to pound the rock, and that’s

something Coach Kelly’s really emphasized,” Golic said. “Anytime you get to see Jonas and [junior running back Cierre Wood] and those guys going off, it makes the O-line feel really good.”

For his part, Jonas Gray said he enjoyed being able to close out the game.

“I wanted to make sure that I had a hand in finishing the game. That’s what it came down to,” he said. “Our linemen did a great job blocking up front. Our receivers did a great job blocking on the perimeter, and Coach Kelly did a great job dialing in plays.”

With his Irish bowl-eligible with three games remaining, Kelly said the program has finally started to show signs of responding to his overall mission.

“We’re on the right track. ... The guys know what they’re playing for,” Kelly said. “We’ve been trying to build this and it’s starting to come and you can see it and that’s why I’m proud of my guys tonight.”

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### player of the game

**Jonas Gray**  
Notre Dame running back

*Gray rushed for 92 yards and one touchdown. He paced the rushing attack as Notre Dame controlled the second-half time of possession.*

### stat of the game

**100 second-half yards**

*The Irish defense allowed zero points and 100 yards in the second half of the team’s first second-half comeback under Brian Kelly.*

### play of the game

**Running back Brandon Pendergrass’ third-quarter fumble in the red zone**

*Five minutes after the Irish jumped ahead 24-17, they recovered a Pendergrass fumble at the Notre Dame 11-yard line.*

### quote of the game

*“The words I would use? Gritty. Tough. You’ve got to win games like this where it’s just a gritty, tough performance.”*

**Brian Kelly**  
Irish coach



# report card

- C+quarterbacks: Tommy Rees continues to make mind-boggling throws that often result in Irish turnovers, with Saturday's flea-flicker attempt serving as the perfect example.
- B+running backs: Jonas Gray and Cierre Wood rushed for 92 and 87 yards, respectively. Most of the damage came in the second half with the Irish leading and trying to chew the clock.
- B+receivers: The receiving corps had a couple of nice blocks to help spring the running game. Michael Floyd and Tyler Eifert made some big plays, but no one has emerged behind them.
- Aoffensive line: The Irish have not allowed a sack in 183 pass attempts, dating back to Sept. 24. Mike Golic Jr. filled in admirably for the injured Braxton Cave as the line dominated the second half.
- A-defensive line: Despite starting two freshmen and a sophomore, Notre Dame's defensive line anchored the defense, holding Wake Forest to 3.0 yards per carry.
- Blinebackers: Carlo Calabrese was out of position as Brandon Pendergrass scored on a wheel route in the first quarter, but the unit helped solidify the defense in the second half.
- A-defensive backs: Gary Gray and Robert Blanton made some excellent open-field tackles, as is typical with Notre Dame's cornerback tandem. Wake Forest passed for only 187 yards in the game.
- A-special teams: Ben Turk has quietly performed very well for the Irish lately. George Atkinson and Austin Collinworth gave the offense good field position, but the punt returns are still ineffective.
- A-coaching: The coaching staff made a key move at halftime by replacing Prince Shembo with Jamoris Slaughter, sparking a strong half from the defense en route to victory.
- 3.43overall: By no means was it a complete game, but the Irish went on the road and beat a team it should beat. There are still problems, starting with the quarterback position.

# adding up the numbers

- Notre Dame has won four consecutive games in November, dating back to last season.4
- The Irish have allowed only 13 third-quarter points in nine games this season.13
- Wake Forest converted only three of its 10 attempts on third down in the loss. The Irish were 6-of-12.3
- Irish senior running back Jonas Gray has scored a touchdown in six consecutive games, totaling nine during that stretch.6
- David Ruffer made a 41-yard field goal in the first quarter, a season-high for the senior kicker.41
- The Irish defense held the Deacons to 110 rushing yards on 37 carries for a 3.0 average.3.0



JULIE HERDER/The Observer  
Irish sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees stands in the pocket during Notre Dame's 24-17 win over Wake Forest on Saturday. Rees completed 14-of-23 passes for 166 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions.

# Irish find consistency, need domination

WINSTOM-SALEM, N.C. — Throughout Saturday's first half, it looked to be Syracuse all over again. A repeat of Connecticut. The Naval Academy refrain we've heard three times in the last five years. It was a game Notre Dame should win, but was setting itself up to lose.

But somewhere along the line, the Irish not only realized they were supposed to win this one, but also that they should, could and would win.

"Tonight was a great step playing on the road against good competition, down at halftime, coming back a couple of times," Irish coach Brian Kelly said following the 24-17 victory. "That's resolve. That's toughness. That's gritty."

That's what Notre Dame has lacked for at least the last four years, if not the last 15. But it's also only the first of two crucial steps for the Irish.

Finally, Notre Dame is winning the games it is supposed to win. Yes, the season-opening loss to South Florida was unacceptable, but the other two losses in the last 13 games — at Michigan and to USC — are relatively understandable, though still not desirable.

Notre Dame has needed to win the games it is supposed to win, not lose to Tulsa, not hand a victory to



Douglas Farmer  
Editor-in-Chief

Denard Robinson at Notre Dame Stadium and not let Navy run the same play over and over again. On Saturday the Irish did manage the win, just as they did at Pittsburgh a few weeks ago, just as they should do "at" Maryland next week.

"We're playing for a consistent performance," Kelly said. "To play like a champion, you have to play consistently. You can't have spurts."

Consistency is the first step, a vital step. Now that the Irish have found that, the time has come to make the next step: Dominating the games they should win.

Letting a middling-ACC team hang around late into the fourth quarter is not the mark of a complete squad. Letting Pittsburgh (who lost to Kelly's former employer, Cincinnati, this weekend) push the game to its closing minutes is not the mark of a Notre Dame team ready to "Play Like A Champion." Coming out flat in the season-opener, and then again in the biggest game of the year two weeks ago, is not the mark of a focused, motivated team.

Rather, these are the marks of a team still hoping for wins. These are the marks of a team looking at a big picture, instead of each week's task. These are the marks of an atmosphere still escaping a prevailing losing mentality.

Hence, that first step was the most important step. Maryland and Boston College are, far and away, the two weakest teams on Notre Dame's schedule this year. Notre Dame should win both games. The Irish should know they should win both games.

And they should do so handily. Dominate the teams you are expected to beat. That is what good football teams do.

"I want winning to become a habit," Kelly said in his weekly Sunday teleconference. "I don't want it to be something that comes and goes. We want to get to that level where we expect to win each and every week. That's something that we're not there yet, but we're on that journey. That's about playing consistently, as well, not having any games that you don't play your best."

If Notre Dame plays its best every week, winning will rarely be an issue. The Irish played down to Pittsburgh's and Wake Forest's levels. Let's not even get started with what they did against South Florida.

Instead, the gold helmets who showed up at West Lafayette, Ind., need to become a weekly occurrence — and no, I am not simply calling for the return of the traditional painted gold helmets. I am calling for a team that insists on dominating its lesser opponents, not simply beating them.

"As we continue to check off a lot of the boxes, the next one is to make winning a habit," Kelly said Sunday.

Having won 10 out of the last 13 overall, winning is nearly habitual once again in South Bend. Now it needs to become good-looking too.

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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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# Third-quarter play secures victory



EILEEN VEIHMEYER/The Observer

Irish senior receiver Michael Floyd reaches for a pass in the third quarter of Notre Dame’s 24-17 win over Wake Forest. Floyd made the catch and gave the Irish a lead they would not relinquish.

By DOUGLAS FARMER  
Editor-in-Chief

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. – Heading into halftime Saturday, Wake Forest had done to the Irish exactly what USC did two weeks ago: Run the ball down Notre Dame’s throat.

The Demon Deacons needed 22 carries to gain 90 yards, but along with the hard-nosed football came a 17-10 lead.

“I just think they executed very well,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said following his team’s eventual 24-17 victory. “They attacked some things and we had to make some adjustments to it.”

By adjustments, Kelly meant continue a season-long trend of Notre Dame third-quarter dominance. The Irish have now outscored their opponents 63-13 in the 15 minutes following halftime, and seven of the points given up came on a USC defensive touchdown.

“We have a game plan coming in, and we execute that the first half,” Irish senior captain and safety Harrison Smith said. “Judging on what they do, our coaches make adjustments. That’s really where it starts — our coaches make great adjustments at halftime.”

This week’s adjustments led to Notre Dame holding Wake Forest to 20 rushing yards on 15 second-half carries. Meanwhile, the two-headed Irish rushing attack of junior Cierre Wood and senior

Jonas Gray led the way for 105 second-half yards on 22 carries, including runs on Notre Dame’s last 11 non-victory formation offensive snaps.

“It’s who we are and this football team obviously takes on an identity,” Kelly said of the second half’s physical nature. “When you’re on the road and you’re playing good competition, you have to close the game out and we did a great job closing it out running the ball.”

Gray’s and Wood’s stats jumped thanks to Notre Dame’s lead in the fourth quarter, and Wake Forest’s rushing stats declined for the same reason. Yet the Deacons still ran the ball 15 times in the second half, for a disappointing 1.33 yards per carry.

Oddly enough, an adjustment geared toward slowing the Wake Forest passing attack led to the shutdown of the running game as well. Irish defensive coordinator Bob Diaco substituted senior safety Jamoris Slaughter for sophomore linebacker Prince Shembo in an attempt to stop Deacons’ sophomore quarterback Tanner Price from finding such good luck with short routes.

“We played a nickel defense pretty much the whole second half — Jamoris Slaughter went in for Prince Shembo and did a great job,” Kelly said. “I thought that really helped us close down some of the bubble throws, some of the quick throws, which had been hurting us.”

Slaughter’s appearance as a pseudo-linebacker follows the trend of his career, where he has also started as a safety and spent significant playing time as a cornerback.

“Jamoris is just one of those guys who can kind of do it all,” Smith said. “He knows everything that goes on in the defense and he knows how to play any position you put him at ... He’s not even the biggest safety on the team. That’s his mindset. He’ll make the impact, instead of be impacted.”

With Slaughter slowing the pass, suddenly Notre Dame’s defensive line — consisting of two freshmen and a sophomore — had time to pressure Price, and the Irish were set from there on out, according to Kelly.

“We kept the ball in front of us and didn’t give up the big play,” Kelly said. “We made it very difficult for Wake Frost to run, and then it became, for us, the ability to get after the quarterback, because we knew the ball was going to be thrown.”

These factors — the adjustments, Slaughter and the increased presence of Gray and Wood — led to Notre Dame doing to Wake Forest in the third quarter just what the Deacons had done to the Irish in the first half: running the ball down their throats to the tune of two touchdowns.

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## scoring summary

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total
ND	10	0	14	0	24
WF	10	7	0	0	17

### First quarter

Wake Forest 7, Notre Dame 0  
Brandon Pendergrass 20-yd pass from Tanner Price (Jimmy Newman kick) with 10:52 remaining  
Drive: 8 plays, 70 yards, 4:08 elapsed

Wake Forest 7, Notre Dame 3  
David Ruffer 44-yd field goal with 6:15 remaining  
Drive: 10 plays, 28 yards, 4:28 elapsed

Wake Forest 10, Notre Dame 3  
Jimmy Newman 46-yd field goal with 4:07 remaining  
Drive: 4 plays, 4 yards, 1:58 elapsed

Wake Forest 10, Notre Dame 10  
Tyler Eifert 38-yd pass from Tommy Rees (David Ruffer kick) with 3:38 remaining  
Drive: 2 plays, 50 yards, 0:23 elapsed

### Second quarter

Wake Forest 17, Notre Dame 10  
Josh Harris 2-yd run (Jimmy Newman kick) with 0:28 remaining  
Drive: 11 plays, 81 yards, 4:49 elapsed

### Third quarter

Wake Forest 17, Notre Dame 17  
Jonas Gray 1-yd run (David Ruffer kick) with 12:54 remaining  
Drive: 6 plays, 62 yards, 1:58 elapsed

Notre Dame 24, Wake Forest 17  
Michael Floyd 16-yd pass from Tommy Rees (David Ruffer kick) with 9:04 remaining  
Drive: 6 plays, 65 yards, 2:22 elapsed

## statistics



# Irish excel in win over Wake Forest

By ALLAN JOSEPH  
Sports Editor

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — While BB&T Field was the smallest venue in which the Irish had played in decades, Saturday’s attendance was one of the biggest in Wake Forest history. The crowd of 36,307 was the fourth-largest crowd in the history of the field.

“They play with great atmosphere,” senior running back Jonas Gray said. “[Running backs coach Tim Hinton] talked throughout the week about how he coached at Cincinnati where it was 37,000 fans — it wasn’t a great atmosphere all the time but those were trap games, when you don’t come out and you come out flat.

“The good thing for us again was to come out in the second half, continue the momentum and we knew we’d come out with a victory.”

### Rees passes Bertelli

With his two touchdown passes Saturday, sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees surpassed Angelo Bertelli for seventh all-time in Notre Dame history. Rees now has 29 touchdown passes in his career. Seventeen of those scores have come this season, good enough for the seventh-best single-season performance in school history.

### Gray keeps scoring

After a one-yard touchdown run in the third quarter, senior running

back Jonas Gray has now scored at least one rushing touchdown in each of the last six games. The last Irish running back to accomplish that feat was Ryan Grant in 2002. Gray’s feat is all the more surprising considering his touchdown against Pittsburgh six weeks ago was the first score of his career.

“The guys did a great job blocking up front,” Gray said. “On that run, all I did was just beat the guys with speed that came through the outside, and the rest was pretty much — John Goodman made a great block — then I tried to get in the end zone.”

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passing			
Rees	14-23-166	Price	17-24-187
rushing			
Gray	19-92	Pendergrass	17-47
Wood	14-87	Givens	4-39
Rees	2-2		
receiving			
Floyd	5-44	Campanaro	6-74
Eifert	3-60	Givens	6-57
Jones	3-16	Pendergrass	2-29
Goodman	1-17	Ford	1-16
Wood	1-17	Parker	1-15
Riddick	1-12	Reynolds	1--4
tackling			
Smith	11	Jackson	8
Blanton	10	Bush	8





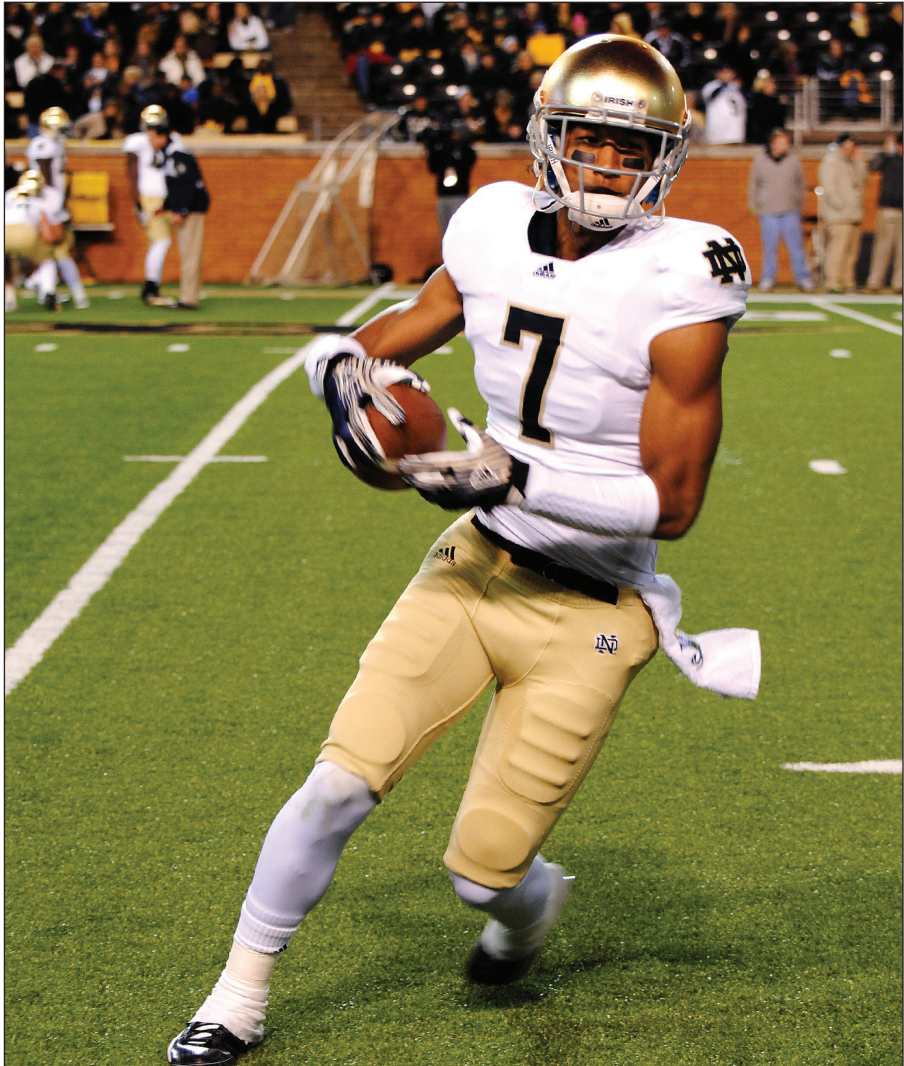
EILEEN VEIHMEYER/The Observer



JULIE HERDER/The Observer

# Grit and guts

On the road for the first time in over a month, the Irish struggled to find a rhythm early in their first-ever meeting with Wake Forest. The Demon Deacons scored on their first drive and took a 17-10 lead into the locker rooms at halftime, but Notre Dame had the final word. The Irish scored two touchdowns in the third quarter and did not allow any points in the second half. Notre Dame improved to 6-3 on the season with three regular season games remaining in 2011. Jonas Gray and Cierre Wood led the Irish offense with a combined 179 rushing yards and one touchdown.



JULIE HERDER/The Observer



JULIE HERDER/The Observer



EILEEN VEIHMEYER/The Observer

Clockwise from top: Irish running back Cierre Wood carries the ball through an open gap; running back Jonas Gray breaks a tackle; receiver T.J. Jones snares a pass near the sideline; kick returner Austin Collinsworth runs away from Deacon defenders; tight end Tyler Eifert makes a catch as a Wake Forest defender tries to tackle him.