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Rees to the rescue

Junior backup relieves starter Golson to lead game-winning drive in 20-17 triumph

By **MIKE MONACO**
Sports Writer

With two minutes and 12 seconds remaining in the game, Notre Dame's quarterback led the Irish down the field and into position for a game-winning 27-yard field goal to beat Purdue 20-17 Saturday at Notre Dame Stadium. But it was not the quarterback everyone expected — sophomore starter Everett Golson. Rather, it was junior Tommy Rees.

Rees, who was suspended for last week's season opener against Navy, replaced Golson on the team's final drive with the score knotted at 17. He led Notre Dame (2-0) on a 12-play, 55-yard drive that culminated with the field goal from sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza.

"The story for me as the head coach is our mantra: next man in," Irish coach Brian Kelly

said. "We had seven guys go down today. Our key players. We had two captains go

down. A leader in the secondary in [graduate student] Jamoris Slaughter. Our guys just kept fighting. The next guy came in and battled. And as you know, the story finishes

with Tommy Rees coming in for Golson and leading us on a two-minute drive to win the game."

Golson led the Irish offense for much of the game, going 21-for-31 for 289 yards and one touchdown through the air. But the sophomore fumbled inside his own 20-yard line with 3:24 left in the game. The miscue led to the game-tying touchdown for Purdue (1-1) with 2:12 remaining in the game and left Golson with an injured hand.

Rees was that next man in for the Irish. The junior completed three of his eight passes on the game-winning drive, including two critical third-down conversions to keep the chains moving. Although he came in cold off the bench, Kelly said Rees is the type of mentally tough player that can lead the team in any situation.

"That's what I knew about him and his makeup, his moxie, his mental toughness," Kelly said. "Does he have all of the elite skills? No. But he's a gamer. He'll do anything."

While Kelly was pleased with Rees' mentality, the coach cleared up any potential quarterback controversy when he announced Golson as next week's

starter against Michigan State.

After a scoreless first quarter, Notre Dame struck first with 3:45 left in the first half when Golson scrambled to his right and dove toward the end zone, extending the ball over the goal line for a three-yard rushing touchdown.

The Boilermakers tied the game at seven with just nine seconds remaining in the first half when senior quarterback Robert Marve connected on a two-yard touchdown pass with senior receiver Antavian Edison.

The Irish responded on their first drive of the second half with a 65-yard drive, 50 of which came through the air, including a three-yard touchdown pass from Golson to junior receiver T.J. Jones. Senior captain and left tackle Zach Martin said the team knew Purdue would attempt to shut down the Notre Dame rushing attack that gashed Navy for 293 yards in week one. The Irish were held to just 52 yards on 32 carries and, as a result, the passing attack needed to rise to the occasion.

"We knew they were going to load the box," Martin said. "If they were going to do that, we were going to put the ball in [Golson's] hand."

Purdue coach Danny Hope echoed that sentiment.

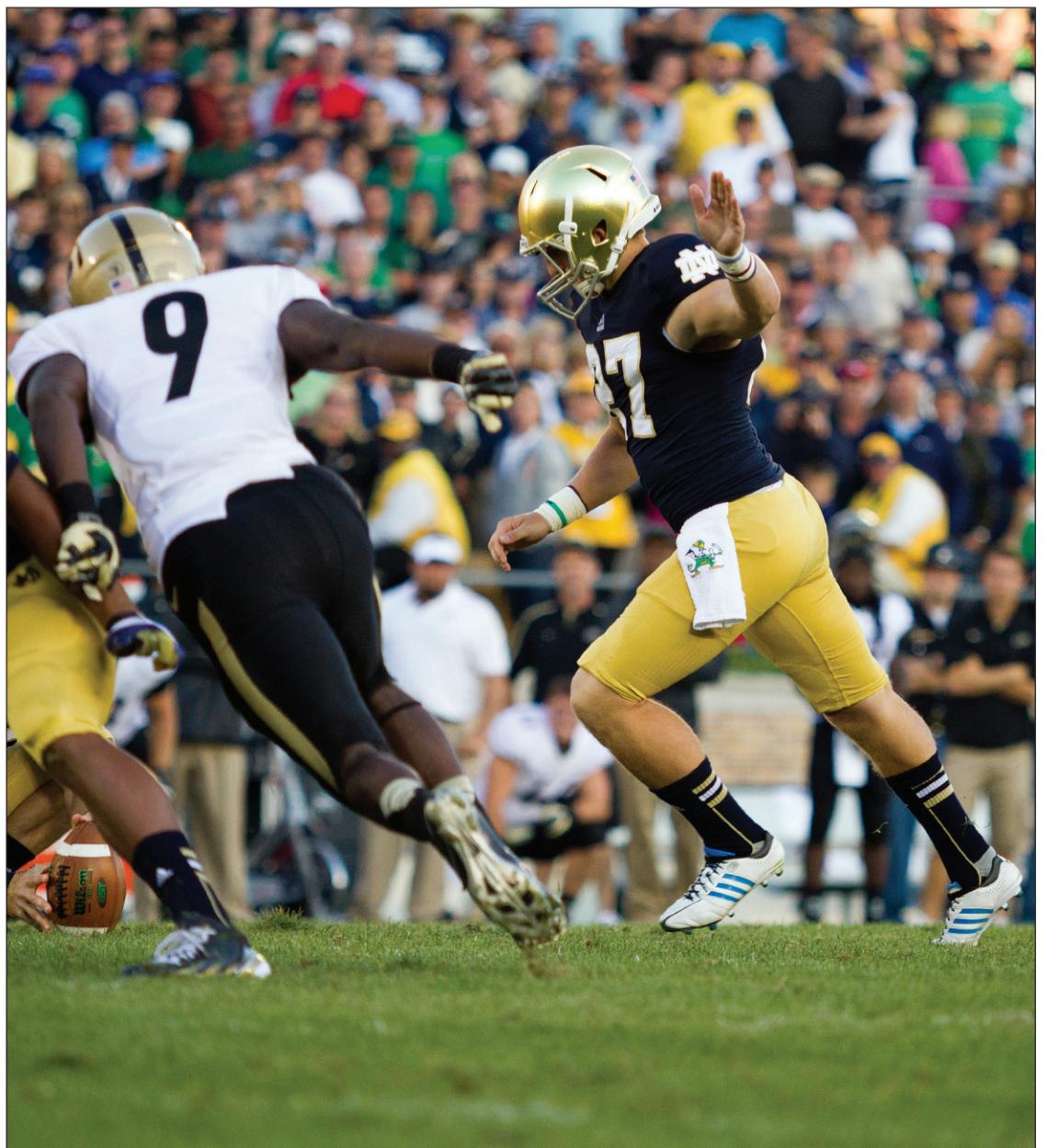
"I thought our defensive front shut down their run game for the most part today," Hope said. "I think out of necessity they had to throw it today."

With the Irish repeatedly going to the air, Purdue's defensive line went after Golson with reckless abandon, recording five sacks despite Golson's elusiveness.

In a similar vein, the Notre Dame defense was stout throughout the game, even though Slaughter, graduate student defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore, freshman defensive end Sheldon Day and sophomore linebacker Ishaq Williams all left the game with injuries.

"Losing [Lewis-Moore] and Slaughter early in the game was a big loss for our team," Irish senior captain and linebacker Manti Te'o said. "But the guys who backed them up really came in and did a great job for us and helped us come out with a victory today."

Though Kelly said none of the injuries are expected to be long-term issues, the Irish turned to other players to step up and



KEVIN SONG | The Observer

Sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza lines up to kick the game-winning 27-yard field goal in Saturday's 20-17 Notre Dame win. Brindza's field goal came at the end of a 12-play, 55-yard drive led by junior quarterback Tommy Rees.

make plays.

Sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt continued his strong start to the season with two sacks, giving him four total for the year. Te'o led the Irish with 10 tackles, and junior defensive tackle Louis Nix had two vital pass deflections at the line of scrimmage.

After the Jones touchdown made it 14-7, Irish junior cornerback Bennett Jackson snatched his first career interception and set Notre Dame up at the Purdue 20-yard line.

Brindza drained a 30-yard field goal, but the Boilermakers made one of their own at the start of the fourth quarter to cut the Notre Dame lead to 17-10.

From there the two teams traded punts back and forth, before Golson coughed the ball up late in the fourth quarter.

Purdue took over at the Notre Dame 15-yard line and eventually faced fourth-and-10 from

the 15. Senior quarterback Caleb TerBush stood calmly in the pocket and delivered a strike to Edison for the touchdown. The extra point tied the game at 17.

After Rees led the Irish down the field, Brindza — who was filling in for injured senior starter Nick Tausch — nailed the game-winner to put Notre Dame on top 20-17.

"48 hours ago we had an injury

to Tausch," Kelly said. "[Brindza] had to step in. That's why I'm so proud of my guys. Next man in. Went in and got the job done."

The Irish will look to start a season 3-0 for the first time since 2002 when they travel to East Lansing, Mich., on Saturday to face Michigan State at 8 p.m.

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PLAYER OF THE GAME

EVERETT GOLSON

NOTRE DAME QUARTERBACK

Despite his late fumble in his own red zone, Golson had an impressive home opener. He was 21-for-31 through the air, throwing for 289 yards and a touchdown. He evaded a relentless pass rush from the Boilermakers and displayed the escapability that fans were looking for during the opener against Navy.

REPORT CARD

B QUARTERBACKS

Everett Golson had a stellar home debut, excluding his late turnover inside his own 20-yard line. The sophomore threw for nearly 300 yards and displayed great mobility. Rees set up the game-winner with little preparation.

B- RUNNING BACKS

The Irish running backs were not called upon to do much, as Purdue stacked the box and made Golson pass. Though the numbers may not pop on a score sheet, Theo Riddick's open-field elusiveness made him a huge asset.

B+ RECEIVERS

A group effort was needed to secure the win. DaVaris Daniels, Tyler Eifert and Troy Niklas all had long receptions downfield. The receivers are proving to be a sure-handed group and avoided any bad drops.

C OFFENSIVE LINE

The group of five that shone against Navy had a tough time containing the stout Purdue line. The right side of the line struggled, and Zack Martin — the group's leader — recorded an uncharacteristic personal foul early.

A DEFENSIVE LINE

Even without captain and leader Kapron Lewis-Moore, the defensive line continued to be the best unit on the roster. Stephon Tuitt had two sacks and Louis Nix added one-and-a-half sacks to go with two passes batted at the line.

B+ LINEBACKERS

The unit saw a new look with Dan Fox moving outside to start and Carlo Calabrese returning to the inside off a suspension. The group stopped the Purdue rushing offense, but a double move by Edison on fourth down beat Calabrese on the late tying score.

B+ DEFENSIVE BACKS

Starting cornerbacks Bennett Jackson and KeiVarae Russell came under pressure after the Navy game, but each had a big game. Jackson recorded two interceptions and Russell was solid in coverage before recording a sack.

C+ SPECIAL TEAMS

It was an up-and-down day for the special teams. Before Brindza's winner, the unit endured a Brindza miss, a few risky decisions by punt returner Davonte' Neal and a big return by Purdue kick returner Raheem Mostert which set up the Boilermaker score before the half.

B+ COACHING

The decision to go to Rees late — while baffling to many fans — ended up producing the winning drive.

OVERALL GPA: 3.0

The wacky ending to the game can easily overshadow many of the stronger aspects of the game for Notre Dame. The defensive line continued to dominate, Golson played a solid home opener and the cornerbacks rebounded from a poor showing against Navy. The offensive line will hope to protect better against Michigan State.

PLAY OF THE GAME

REES TO GOODMAN DESPERATION HEAVE CONVERTS ON THIRD DOWN

With the ball at midfield and time winding down, the Irish faced a critical third-and-six on what ended up being the game-winning drive. Rees took the snap with the play clock near zero and heaved an under-thrown pass in the direction of Goodman, near the sideline. Goodman adjusted and caught the pass to keep the crucial drive going.



KEVIN SONG | The Observer

Senior tight end and captain Tyler Eifert looks to make a move downfield after catching a pass. Eifert left the home opener with a mild concussion and was replaced by sophomores Ben Koyack and Troy Niklas.

'Next man in' philosophy gives reason for hope



Chris Allen
Sports Editor

Well, here we are.

Two continents, two countries, two trans-Atlantic flights and even two quarterbacks have been featured in between, but here we are. The Irish are 2-0, and all most will say is Notre Dame won two games it should have won, and caused too many heart attacks in between. But if you think Notre Dame, Brian Kelly and Everett Golson didn't prove anything in yesterday's win, you're wrong. The last-second win may have left some students and fans walking away from the stadium with a bad taste in their mouths, but this is a different Notre Dame.

Since the Irish last took the field in a BCS game after the 2006 season, the program has struggled through five years of losses that seemed so familiar it was as if they followed a script. It goes something like this.

The Irish run out of the tunnel, followed by an opponent most consider significantly inferior. Once the game gets underway, the Irish can't pull away on the scoreboard. They turn the ball over. They miss tackles. They lose the battle for

field position. They lose the game. The role of the opponent was played by Syracuse, Connecticut, Tulsa, South Florida and thrice by Navy.

The script nearly played out again at Notre Dame Stadium against the Boilermakers on Saturday. Even though Golson played well, the Irish couldn't pull away on the scoreboard. They let Purdue hang around, and a late turnover by Golson let Purdue tie the score. But something different happened. The Irish buckled down, converted third-downs, made a big kick and won the game. Talk about flipping the script.

Make no mistake — this is a game Notre Dame would have lost during the 2007-2011 seasons. The script felt so familiar. That was the weird taste in your mouth as you walked away from the stadium — you've seen that game before. Take heart in the surprise ending to the script: Notre Dame is 2-0.

The new lines in the script owe to the mantra Kelly hangs his hat on — "Next Man In." Few in the country can line up with the talent Notre Dame has at many positions. Yet, when it needed a big sack from a defensive end, captain Kapron Lewis-Moore was on the sidelines. The next men in stepped up

and sophomore and burgeoning star Stephon Tuitt added two more sacks to his rising season total. When it needed a big reception to keep the chains moving late in the game, leading receivers Tyler Eifert and DaVaris Daniels were on the sidelines with injuries. The next men in, John Goodman, Robby Toma and Troy Niklas were the targets on the last drive. When Notre Dame needed a replacement for the most experienced member of an inexperienced secondary, Matthias Farley played exceptionally in the place of Jamoris Slaughter. These are just a few examples, as Elijah Shumate, Tony Springmann, Sheldon Day, Kyle Brindza and Daniel Smith — all guys who won't see their names in the starting lineup — stepped in and contributed to the win.

Let me acknowledge the obvious: Saturday's win wasn't pretty. It was bizarre. It was dramatic. It was at times familiar.

But Kelly's next men stepped up and won the Irish a game they had to win.

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



KIRBY MCKENNA | The Observer

Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson dives forward near the goal line in Notre Dame's 20-17 win Saturday. Golson, making his home debut, passed for 289 yards and threw a touchdown to junior wide receiver T.J. Jones. Golson opened the scoring in the second quarter with a three-yard touchdown run, which was upheld after a video review.

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

The Irish home opener at Notre Dame Stadium brought with it an unexpected amount of late drama and an unlikely hero. Starting quarterback Everett Golson threw for 289 yards and a touchdown, but junior backup Tommy Rees returned from a suspension and came off the bench late to lead the game-winning drive in a 20-17 victory. The Irish are 2-0 for the first time since 2008.



JODI LO | The Observer

Junior cornerback Bennett Jackson celebrates his first career interception with senior linebacker Manti Te'o.



KIRBY MCKENNA | The Observer

The Irish defensive line crowds the line of scrimmage to stop the Purdue offense.



KIRBY MCKENNA | The Observer

Senior linebacker and captain Manti Te'o flies in to disrupt a Purdue ballcarrier. Te'o had 10 tackles.



KEVIN SONG | The Observer

Notre Dame sophomore wide receiver DaVaris Daniels looks to cut back in the open field. Daniels had 70 yards receiving in his home debut, including a team-long 41-yard grab.



KEVIN SONG | The Observer

Irish freshman punt returner Davonte' Neal eludes a Purdue defender. Neal had 4 returns for a net of one yard, but tallied an eight-yard return in the contest.