

IRISH INSIDER

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2012

RISING AGAIN

LINEBACKER DANNY SPOND RETURNS
FROM A CAREER-THREATENING INJURY

THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Suzanna Pratt and Brandon Keelean

COMMENTARY

Kelly's program has evolved



Allan Joseph
Editor-in-Chief

We said it for last year's USC contest, this year's Michigan game and just two weeks ago against Stanford. But this time, it's really true — at least for a few weeks. It's the biggest game of Irish coach Brian Kelly's career at Notre Dame.

Stanford might have been a season-defining victory, for it all but guaranteed Notre Dame a BCS bowl berth and a return to national prominence. Beating Oklahoma might be a career-defining victory for Kelly. His squad is simultaneously a top-five team and a 10-point underdog. A run at a crystal football awaits the winner of the contest. And he's taking his team to Memorial Stadium, one of the toughest places to win in college football: Oklahoma is a staggering 79-4 in its friendly confines under coach Bob Stoops.

The stakes are high. The lights are bright. The pressure is crushing. And Kelly? He's loving it.

"[Games like this] are why you coach at Notre Dame," he said Tuesday in his weekly press conference.

My, how times have changed. Almost exactly two years ago, the Irish faced a team from the Sooner State. Instead of a contest pivotal in national-championship dreams, this one seemed key to bowl-eligibility hopes. As every Irish fan knows, Notre Dame dropped to 4-5 after a stunning loss to, yes, Tulsa. Then-freshman quarterback Tommy Rees threw three interceptions, including the game-sealing pick when the Irish were in a position to play for a game-winning field goal.

Back then, Kelly was just getting his feet wet. He was trying to overhaul a roster stacked with unfulfilled potential at skill positions and mediocrity on the offensive line. This year, he's winning with a dominant front seven on defense and a running game that comes through when it's needed — fundamental football if there ever was such a thing.

The transformation is a testament to Kelly's vision for the

program, but it also speaks to the ways he's changed since he took the job. After that same Tulsa contest, Kelly told Irish fans to "get used to" aggressive playcalling at the end of games. In the 2012 season (see: Purdue, Stanford and BYU), Kelly took the smarter, safer, more conservative route — he ran the ball and came out on top. Two-and-a-half years in, he's learned that playing aggressive all the time doesn't work, but that picking the right spots to take shots (Tyler Eifert's touchdown catch against Stanford) does.

After spending two years being blunt about the talent levels on his roster — and alienating a lot of his players in the process — Kelly has lightened up this year. He's found the balance between pushing his players hard and having some fun along the way, and the results are evident. The Irish are more focused and more cohesive now than at any time during the last four years, and it's a big reason Notre Dame is 7-0 this year.

Yet at his core, Kelly is still the same coach who was hired in Dec. 2009. He's the coach who emphasizes the "Right Kind of Guys," strong line play and world-class assistant coaches. He's the coach who will be blunt about his team's shortcomings and its strengths. He's the coach who thinks tradition is good, but winning is better. Most of all, he's the coach who thinks he has the recipe to make Notre Dame a player in the national championship conversation again.

Saturday, we'll find out if he's right. We'll find out if he's going to extend the legacy of legendary third years by Notre Dame coaches (Frank Leahy, Ara Parseghian, Dan Devine and Lou Holtz all won national championships in their third years). We'll find out if the Irish belong at the top of the polls once again.

And if they do? That would be the biggest sign that the times really have changed.

Contact Allan Joseph at ajoseph2@nd.edu

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

Check out the "Waking the Echoes" series online at ndsmcobserver.com.

This week's installment features **Tony Fisher**.

RECRUITING

BYU atmosphere impresses top RB recruit Folston

By **CHRIS ALLEN**
Sports Editor

Notre Dame's ground-and-pound 17-14 victory over BYU last Saturday served as the backdrop to an eventful recruiting weekend for the Irish recruiting staff. The Irish hosted several current and future commits and uncommitted recruits, with the highlight being 2013 running back prospect Tarean Folston. Folston, a speedy back from Cocoa, Fla., is the No. 79 player in the country according to ESPN. The Irish already have a commitment at running back in the 2013 class from power back Jamel James, but Notre Dame recruiting expert Mike Frank said Folston and the Irish are a good fit.

"I think [Folston] really loved his visit. He thinks he fits in really well with Notre Dame: the players, the culture and the environment," said Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliated Irish Sports Daily. "That aspect is a really big thing for him, and he was really impressed from that perspective. He's going to take a long time; he's not going to rush into any decision. It'll be awhile; I fully expect it to be maybe even January before he makes a decision.

"I think Notre Dame did a good job with him, so it's just time to wait and see what happens.

They've made it known he's a guy they really, really want and will wait for. At the end of the day, they have a good shot."

2013 Notre Dame linebacker commitment Alex Anzalone made waves over BYU weekend when he cancelled a scheduled recruiting visit to Notre Dame. Anzalone has been rumored for weeks to be wavering in his commitment to the Irish after a positive visit to Florida. Frank said he is worried about the possibility of an Anzalone decommitment.

"[Anzalone] was playing a late game Friday, and it was out of town, so they cancelled because they couldn't have stayed on Sunday either," Frank said. "So, where that stands, the staff doesn't really know. Notre Dame has done its best to put its best foot forward, but for whatever reason, [Anzalone] seems to have some doubts about the school. I'd say I'm more negative than positive about the situation, and it wouldn't surprise me if he de-commits."

Frank also said the Notre Dame recruiting staff has work to do to strengthen the commitment of another member of its 2013 linebacker class. Danny Mattingly from Spokane, Wash., committed to Notre Dame on June 26 but is still taking visits to other campuses. Frank said there

might be a disagreement about Mattingly's position.

"[Mattingly] is definitely a risk. I think the problem Notre Dame has run into with Danny Mattingly is that he wants to play offense, and Notre Dame recruited him as a defensive player," Frank said. "Notre Dame has probably told him he is going to end up on defense. The problem is some other schools are saying they will take him as an offensive player because they like him on offense."

With two home games remaining in the season, Frank said the Irish staff must remain focused on securing the commitment of another defensive back.

"The priority at this point has to be cornerback. They need a cornerback. That has to be where they are focused right now, with guys like L.J. Moore and Chris Hawkins and Priest Willis still out there," he said. "One of those guys would have to be the top priority at this point."

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 Chris Allen at callen10@nd.edu

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Comeback kid

Junior linebacker Danny Spond completes journey from hospital bed to starting lineup

By **MATTHEW DeFRANKS**
Associate Sports Editor

It was a simple routine for Danny Spond.

He would wake up. His neurosurgeon would visit him. They would discuss his progress. His physical therapist would come in. They would move around. He would rest and wait — wait for a prognosis, wait for a recovery, wait to walk again.

The next day, the junior linebacker would wake up in South Bend Memorial Hospital and do it all over again.

What started as a simple headache grew to a pounding and crippling migraine for Spond, who spent three days at Memorial Hospital and one day in a fourth-floor room at the University of Michigan's Neurology Clinic.

"It was tough, a lot of tears," Spond said. "I just realized this was all in my plans, all in God's plan for me. He wasn't going to give me anything I wasn't going to be able to face."

After Spond arrived at the hospital Aug. 8, he could not move the left side of his body and feared he would never walk again — but then the visitors began to come.

The entire coaching staff and senior linebackers Manti Te'o and Dan Fox stopped by Wednesday night to visit the Littleton, Colo., native. Spond's father and girlfriend both made the trip to check in on him.

"It meant everything to me," Spond said. "I was in the hospital alone for a little bit without my family because they couldn't get there right away. Just having my other family

there meant everything to me.

"Medicine can only support you for so long until you need your family and friends to help you."

Despite the upcoming season, Spond, who suffered a severe concussion in high school, said he could only think of one thing.

"The only thing I was focusing on was my health, being able to fully function again and I had no idea how long it was going to be," Spond said.

Spond, who still does not know what caused the debilitating migraine, missed the first two games of the season, relegated to the sidelines as Notre Dame topped Navy and Purdue.

"It was really tough, just watching from the sidelines, acting as a coach really," Spond said. "It was very difficult and it was tough to deal with, a lot of ups and downs. The love for the game just kept me going through. My faith knowing that I was going to get back out there was my driver. It was very hard. I didn't like it by any means, hope to avoid it."

Despite the increased awareness on head injuries in football, Spond said the migraine has not affected the way he plays.

"Once I was fully recovered and was confident I was going to be taken care of, I just played my game, just get out there and do what I love to do," Spond said.

Breaking out

Spond made a full recovery in time to make his first career start at then-No. 10 Michigan State, taking over at the drop linebacker position.



MACKENZIE SAIN | The Observer

Notre Dame junior linebacker Danny Spond makes a tackle against Michigan State on Sept. 15. Spond returned to the field against the Spartans after missing the season's first two games with a head injury.

"Going into that week's preparation, I told myself, no matter how good of a game, no matter how bad of a game, we're just going to give it our all," Spond said. "At the end of day, we'll be okay. The score and my play will take care of itself. I was very nervous, first start in a college game going up against Michigan State, an awesome team and very strong. I was nervous but I knew I was prepared for this."

Spond finished with four tackles in Notre Dame's 20-3 domination of the Spartans.

The Knott Hall resident played quarterback and defensive back in high school and was recruited to Notre Dame as an athlete but primarily played on special teams his first two seasons in South Bend. He totaled 14 tackles in 2010 and 2011.

"It was great for game experience," Spond said. "I learned the game speed the past couple years on there. It definitely had a lot of benefits."

As a former quarterback and a current coverage linebacker, Spond said his experience on the other side of the ball helps him tremendously.

"I've seen what the quarterback sees during the game so that definitely helps with my coverages," he said. "It adds a new dimension to being able to play a game."

Spond has piled up 22 tackles, an assisted tackle for loss and an athletic pass breakup despite playing in just five games. He said the production can be attributed to his newfound experience.

"I'm very comfortable at my spot and I understand my role,"

Spond said. "The past couple years, I have been a little hesitant to make a mistake here or there but this year I have a new perspective on the game, I have a second chance and it's time to get out there, play and have fun."

Spond has been a key cog for an Irish defense that ranks

this team. He's dedicated himself and he could have easily just threw in the towel," Te'o said. "I think it motivated him even more to come back bigger, stronger and faster, and to play the amount of snaps that he's playing it takes a lot. It takes a toll on your body, and for him to do what he's doing and be

"I just realized this was all in my plans, all in God's plan for me. He wasn't going to give me anything I wasn't going to be able to face."

Danny Spond
Irish junior linebacker

second in the country in scoring defense, allowing just 9.4 points per game. The political science major has consistently been on the field for not only first and second down but also third down.

"I think it's the classic case of somebody making you notice him," Irish coach Brian Kelly said. "His play makes you notice him. He's played extremely well this year, and we knew he had some real strengths at the position for us. He's thick, he's strong. But he's athletic, and he works really well in space for a big fella."

"And I think that's been his development this year, is that he's kept himself on the field on third down. He's not just a first and second down guy. I think that speaks a lot to him."

Te'o agreed with Kelly's assessment of Spond.

"Danny has sacrificed a lot and put a lot of hard work into

doing the things he's doing so as well speaks a lot to his dedication and commitment to this team."

During Notre Dame's 17-14 win over BYU on Saturday, Spond had another career first — an interception. On the Cougars' final possession, Spond dropped back into coverage before making a leaping snag to seal the Irish victory and 7-0 start.

"That was unbelievable for me, having to get in there and seal the game and having that happen was awesome," Spond said. "The ball went up in the air and there wasn't going to be anybody that was going to take it away from me."

Now Danny Spond has a new routine — no more hospitals, no more headaches, no more bedrest. Just football.

Contact Matthew DeFranks at mdefrank@nd.edu



EILEEN VEIHEMEYER | The Observer

Notre Dame junior linebacker Danny Spond celebrates his game-ending interception in the 17-14 Irish win over BYU on Saturday.



AP



AP

SOONERS PASSING

The Irish defense will face its toughest test yet in Sooners senior quarterback Landry Jones. Jones owns nearly every record for an Oklahoma quarterback, including wins, passing yards, touchdown passes and completions. The senior has already thrown for 1,644 yards and 12 touchdowns this season. In his last three games, Jones has 871 passing yards, seven touchdowns and a quarterback rating of 151.7 while throwing just one interception. The Sooner offense is fifth in the NCAA in scoring, averaging 44.7 points per game.

Jones leads a Sooner offense that has found its groove since a 24-19 loss to then-No. 15 Kansas State on Sept. 22. The Sooner have outscored their last three opponents by a 156-48 margin. In those games, Oklahoma averaged 484.7 yards of total offense. Junior receiver Kenny Stills remains an explosive threat, leading the Sooners in receiving yards (471), receptions (38) and receiving touchdowns (4). Jones and his receiving corps average a first down per completion at 12.4 yards per catch. Out of the backfield, junior fullback Trey Millard poses a significant passing threat. The fullback averages 15.5 yards per catch and has two touchdowns to go along with his 201 receiving yards.

Going up against the 24th best passing offense in the country, the Irish secondary has been criticized for its inexperience. But the Irish passing defense ranks 14th in the nation, giving up only 174 passing yards per game. Sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt is third in the NCAA in sacks with eight-and-a-half after recording two in Notre Dame's 17-14 win over BYU on Saturday. Meanwhile, only one player in the FBS has recorded more turnovers than Irish senior linebacker Manti Teo's six. After an interception Saturday, Teo is tied with junior cornerback Bennett Jackson for the team lead with four. The Irish defense gave up a touchdown for the first time in over a month Saturday in the form of two passing touchdowns. The Irish also came away with two more interceptions against the Cougars.

EDGE: OKLAHOMA

SOONERS RUSHING

Junior running back Damien Williams leads a balanced Sooner rushing attack with 572 rushing yards and seven rushing touchdowns. But the real twist in the Sooner offense is sophomore quarterback Blake Bell. Used in short-yardage and goal line situations, the 6-foot-6, 254-pound Bell leads the team with eight rushing touchdowns.

The Irish defense still has not allowed a rushing touchdown this season. The Irish head to Norman boasting the second-best scoring defense in the country and the 15th best rushing defense. Against BYU, the Irish gave up only 66 rushing yards. Saturday's match-up at Oklahoma will pit the Sooners' top-ranked red-zone offense against Notre Dame's second-ranked red-zone defense.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

SOONERS OFFENSIVE COACHING

Defensive coordinator Bob Diaco has succeeded at preparing his defense against a variety of threats this season and looks to do the same against the best offense he has seen so far this season.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

SOONERS SPECIAL TEAMS

Oklahoma is the only team in the FBS to rank in the top six in kick return average (31.2 yards) and punt return average (17.9 yards). Last week Sooners returned a 90-yard punt return and a 100-yard kickoff return for touchdowns.

EDGE: OKLAHOMA

SOONERS SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	@ UTEP	W 24-7
Sept. 8	Florida A&M	W 69-13
Sept. 22	Kansas State	L 24-19
Oct. 6	@ Texas Tech	W 41-20
Oct. 13	Texas	W 63-21
Oct. 20	Kansas	W 52-7
Oct. 27	Notre Dame	
Nov. 3	@ Iowa State	
Nov. 10	Baylor	
Nov. 17	@ West Virginia	
Nov. 24	Oklahoma State	
Dec. 1	@ TCU	

HEAD T

NO. 8 OKLAHOMA



(Jr.) Damien Williams 26 RB (Sr.) Dominique Whaley 8	(Jr.) Kenny Stills 4 WR (Fr.) Trey Metoyer 17
(Sr.) Landry Jones 12 QB (So.) Blake Bell 10	(Sr.) Lane Johnson 69 LT (So.) Tyrus Thompson 71
(Jr.) Trey Millard 33 FB (So.) Aaron Ripkowski 48	(So.) Adam Shead 74 LG (Jr.) Austin Woods 50
	(Jr.) Gabe Ikard 64 C (Fr.) Ty Darlington 56
	(Jr.) Bronson Irwin 68 RG (Jr.) Austin Woods 50
	(So.) Daryl Williams 79 RT (R-Fr.) Derek Farniok 72
	(So.) Geneo Grissom 85 TE (Fr.) Taylor McNamara 88
	(Sr.) Justin Brown 19 WR (Fr.) Durrone Neal 13



(Jr.) Gabe Lynn 9 NB (So.) Julian Wilson 2	(Jr.) Aaron Colvin 14 CB (Fr.) Gary Simon 27
(Jr.) Tony Jefferson 1 FS (Sr.) Jesse Paulsen 42	(So.) Chuka Ndulue 98 DE (Sr.) R.J. Washington 11
(Jr.) Tom Wort 21 MLB (R-Fr.) Frank Shannon 20	(Sr.) Casey Walker 53 DT (R-Fr.) Jordan Phillips 80
(Jr.) Corey Nelson 7 OLB (So.) Aaron Franklin 25	(Sr.) Jamarkus McFarland 97 DT (Sr.) David King 90
(Sr.) Javon Harris 30 SS (Jr.) Gabe Lynn 9	(Sr.) David King 90 DE (Fr.) Mike Onuoha 84
	(Sr.) Demontre Hurst 6 CB (Sr.) Lamar Harris 15



(So.) Michael Hunnicutt 18 PK (R-Fr.) Eric Hosek 47	(Sr.) Tress Way 36 KO
(Sr.) Tress Way 36 P (R-Fr.) Dylan Seibert 37	(Jr.) Roy Finch 22 KR (Jr.) Brennan Clay 24
(Sr.) Justin Brown 19 PR (Jr.) Kenny Stills 4	(Jr.) Austin Woods 50 LS



Allan Joseph
Editor-in-Chief



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Chris Allen
Sports Editor

When the best teams clash in the biggest games under the brightest lights, the simplest things tend to determine the outcome. Defense. Turnovers. Special teams. Mental mistakes. Penalties. Tackling. The list goes on — but the point is, fundamentals matter.

The Sooners are incredibly skilled. Their passing game is a bona fide juggernaut, their defense is stout and they'll have an amped-up Memorial Stadium on their side. But their offensive line is young, and their rush defense has shown vulnerability. In the end, though, this game will be won in its waning minutes by the team that makes fewer mistakes and has a stronger will to win. It's going to be epic, and it's going to be remembered for a long time. Especially since the Irish are going to pull it off.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 24, Oklahoma 21

Notre Dame has two factors in its favor heading into Saturday's top-10 clash with Oklahoma. The Sooner rush defense ranks 46th in the country — lowest among top-10 teams — and Oklahoma's turnover margin ranks 43rd. If the Irish can force turnovers, protect the football and establish the running game early in Norman, they have a chance.

I just don't see those three stars aligning this weekend for the No. 5 Irish. Notre Dame should compete in any game because of its elite defense, but the stagnant offense will finally catch up to Brian Kelly's squad.

The Irish run defense will hold running back Damien Williams in check, but this will be the week Notre Dame's secondary makes a couple costly miscues in a Sooner victory.

FINAL SCORE: Oklahoma 23, Notre Dame 10

Over a month has passed since, but this sure feels a lot like Michigan State week. Yet again, the Irish head on the road to a top-10 opponent fresh off an ugly home win against an inferior team. Yet again, for many of the same reasons, few think the Irish will win. But on the field in East Lansing, this team showed that there was quite a bit more to the story. There is more to the story this week, too.

Against an Oklahoma offensive line that has endured an up-and-down season — against tame Big 12 defenses — Bob Diaco will unleash his playbook and let the likes of Stephon Tuitt and Prince Shembo free. Landry Jones and Oklahoma got punched in the mouth by Kansas State and backed down. The Irish are built like the Wildcats and may do the same.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 24, Oklahoma 21

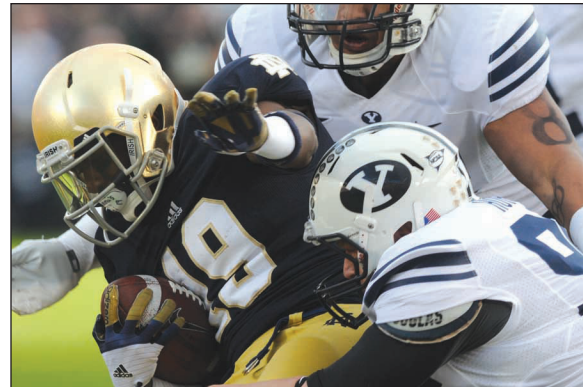
0 HEAD



NO. 5 NOTRE DAME



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer



OE KENESEY | The Observer

CB 6 KeiVarae Russell (Fr.)
43 Josh Atkinson (So.)

OLB 13 Danny Spond (Jr.)
30 Ben Council (So.)

DE 89 Kapron Lewis-Moore (Gr.)
91 Sheldon Day (Fr.)

NG 9 Louis Nix (Jr.)
96 Kona Schwenke (Jr.)

DE 7 Stephon Tuitt (So.)
69 Tony Springmann (So.)

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

CB 2 Bennett Jackson (Jr.)
21 Jalen Brown (So.)



WR 7 T.J. Jones (Jr.)
10 DaVaris Daniels (So.)

WR 9 Robby Toma (Sr.)
19 Davonte Neal (Fr.)

RT 74 Christian Lombard (Jr.)
64 Tate Nichols (Jr.)

RG 57 Mike Golic Jr. (Gr.)
72 Nick Martin (So.)

C 52 Braxton Cave (Gr.)
57 Mike Golic Jr. (Gr.)

LG 66 Chris Watt (Sr.)
65 Conor Hanratty (So.)

LT 70 Zack Martin (Sr.)
78 Ronnie Stanley (Fr.)

TE 80 Tyler Eifert (Sr.)
18 Beth Koyack (So.)

WR 81 John Goodman (Gr.)
87 Daniel Smith (Jr.)



KO 27 Kyle Brindza (So.)
40 Nick Tausch (Sr.)

KR 4 George Atkinson (So.)
6 Theo Riddick (Sr.)

LS 60 Jordan Cowart (Sr.)
61 Scott Daly (Fr.)

PK 27 Kyle Brindza (So.)
40 Nick Tausch (Sr.)

P 35 Ben Turk (Sr.)
27 Kyle Brindza (So.)

PR 19 Davonte Neal (Fr.)
81 John Goodman (Gr.)



IRISH PASSING

Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson is back in the starting role after missing Saturday's 17-14 win over BYU due to a concussion suffered the previous week. Filling in for Golson, junior quarterback Tommy Rees threw for 117 yards with a touchdown and an interception while completing less than half of his passes. Golson leads the Irish with 968 passing yards and four touchdowns and has also thrown three interceptions. The win over BYU saw senior tight end Tyler Eifert return to form with four receptions for 73 yards and a touchdown. Eifert leads the team in receiving with 319 yards and three touchdowns while junior receiver T.J. Jones leads the team with 21 receptions and is second on the team with 275 receiving yards and two touchdowns.

Oklahoma's passing defense ranks ninth in the country in passing defense, giving up only 163.5 passing yards per game. Senior safety Javon Harris leads the Sooners with four interceptions, including two last week in a 52-7 win over Kansas. In their last three games, the Sooners have forced nine turnovers, with seven of them coming as interceptions. Junior safety Tony Jefferson leads the team in tackles with 48.

EDGE: OKLAHOMA

IRISH RUSHING

In the last three games, the Irish have rushed for 796 yards, led by senior running back Theo Riddick. Riddick had a career game last week against BYU, rushing for a career-high 143 yards and averaging 9.5 yards per carry. The highlight of the afternoon came on a hard-fought 55-yard run in the third quarter where Riddick kept his balance and nearly ran for a touchdown. Riddick leads the team with 451 rushing yards and 95 carries. Just as he did in a 41-3 win over Miami on Oct. 6, senior running back Cierre Wood gave the Irish a second running back with over 100 rushing yards in a single game with 114 yards on 18 carries. Since missing the first two games to suspension, Wood has rushed for 393 yards and two touchdowns. Sophomore running back George Atkinson gave

the Irish their only rushing touchdown Saturday early in the fourth quarter to give Notre Dame a lead it wouldn't relinquish. Atkinson has recorded 314 rushing yards and leads the Irish with four rushing touchdowns and an impressive 8.1 yards per carry.

The Sooners have the No. 12-ranked scoring defense in the country, giving up 15.3 points per game. The Sooners also give up 138.2 rushing yards per game, good enough for 46th-best in the nation. Against the Jayhawks last week, the Sooners gave up 185 rushing yards, while they gave up 213 rushing yards in a 24-19 loss to Kansas State.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

The Irish may have found a niche in its rushing attack, but Brian Kelly's spread offense has been inefficient in the passing game. Meanwhile, Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops and his brother, defensive coordinator Mike Stoops, have a track record as one of college football's great defensive coaching staffs.

EDGE: OKLAHOMA

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

Sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza missed two field goals against BYU and is 1-for-3 in field goals of 40 yards or more. Senior punter Ben Turk averages over 40 yards per punt, but the Irish average only 2.8 yards per punt return with freshman receiver Davonte Neal. Atkinson averages 19.4 yards per kick return and has yet to show the same explosiveness on returns as he did last year.

EDGE: OKLAHOMA

IRISH SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	vs. Navy	W 50-10
Sept. 8	Purdue	W 20-17
Sept. 15	@ Michigan St.	W 20-3
Sept. 22	Michigan	W 13-6
Oct. 6	vs. Miami	W 41-3
Oct. 13	Stanford	W 20-13 (OT)
Oct. 20	BYU	W 17-14
Oct. 27	@ Oklahoma	
Nov. 3	Pittsburgh	
Nov. 10	@ Boston College	
Nov. 17	Wake Forest	
Nov. 24	@ USC	



Andrew Gastelum
Associate Sports Editor



Matthew DeFranks
Associate Sports Editor

For Notre Dame, this is the gauge game: The game that will determine whether this Notre Dame team is for real or just plain lucky.

The key to this game will be controlling possession, meaning the Irish must run the ball effectively and hold onto it. Nothing would be better for Everett Golson on the road than to hand the ball off on almost every single play rather than feel the pressure of having to try to do everything himself.

On the road, the Irish cannot settle for field goal attempts. To win this one, they have to take advantage of their scoring opportunities because the defense will be occupied with Landry Jones and the prolific Oklahoma offense.

But somehow and somehow, they will, just like they have done all season long.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 24, Oklahoma 23

Let's look at the stats. Oklahoma's scoring offense is fifth in the country and is averaging 52 points per game in their last three contests.

Now let's check out the other side of the story. The Sooners' biggest wins are over Texas and Texas Tech while they lost to the only elite team they faced — Kansas State. In the win, the Wildcats rushed for 213 yards against Oklahoma while forcing three Sooner turnovers. Can the Irish do that? Of course.

But the question is will they? Everett Golson and the three Notre Dame running backs should be able to carve out some space in the Oklahoma defense and the Irish front seven could cause problems for Landry Jones.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 16, Oklahoma 14

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Shembo evolves into pass-rushing force



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Irish junior linebacker Prince Shembo chases BYU quarterback Riley Nelson during Notre Dame's 17-14 victory over the Cougars on Saturday. Shembo has been one of the main pass rushers for the Irish, recording two sacks on the season. He is tied for the Irish lead in quarterback hurries with eight on the year.

By **ANDREW GASTELUM**
Associate Sports Editor

Before Notre Dame home games, spectators usually see the intimidating sight of junior linebacker Prince Shembo running the sidelines with a key tool to the defense's success.

"We brought a sledgehammer out and it symbolizes toughness, that's what it is," Shembo said. "It bends a lot of things, smashes stuff around like nails and stuff. That's what we do. It might have been coach [Bob Diaco's] idea.

"If it comes [to Oklahoma], I'm going to grab it."

Since moving from the drop linebacker position in pass coverage to the strong-side rusher this season, Shembo has been a destructive force in the Irish front seven with two sacks and three tackles for a loss.

"I just worked hard in the off-season," he said. "The coaches have improved my skill set so I'm trying to be a better overall player. Just studying more film is where it all starts. This is my third year, so obviously fundamentals and learning my opponent [is key]. Just being a student of the game and working on the

little things. That's where it really happens."

Irish coach Brian Kelly said the reason the coaching staff moved Shembo to the drop linebacker was to make sure the defense had its top talent on the field as much as possible.

"It was definitely to get our best players on the field at the time," Kelly said. "And, as you know, we were developing some younger players at the position. Prince obviously plays much better when we can shorten the field and he can get after the quarterback [...]. It's just a more natural fit for him being at the cat position."

The Charlotte, N.C., native leads the Irish with eight quarterback hurries, a crucial asset when going up against one of college football's most prolific passers in Oklahoma senior quarterback Landry Jones.

In his last road game on Sept. 15, the Irish upset then-No. 10 Michigan State by the score of 20-3 behind Shembo's career-high nine tackles—eight coming in the first half alone. Heading into the biggest road game of the season, the third-year linebacker said he is looking forward to the challenge.

"To be honest, I like road games. I like away games," Shembo said. "I like when people come and they have stuff to say and everyone is against us. I like that feeling, so I think it will be a great atmosphere [Saturday]."

"It's the same mentality. We are never going to change for any game. Whatever the challenge is, we are going to be the same and be ourselves. We are like a bunch

of little kids. We like to have fun and run around."

Shembo sets the edge for the nation's second-ranked scoring defense that gives up only 9.43 points per game and has yet to give up a rushing touchdown this season, drawing the praise of coaches and teammates alike.

"Prince has done a tremendous job in not only just setting the edge but being a player and being

a weapon out there," senior linebacker Manti Te'o said. "If you look at him, Prince is not that big, compared to the guys he's going up against, but when you watch the tape, that little 6-foot-1 dude is folding 6-foot-8, 300-pound linemen. So I'm happy to be on the same side as Prince Shembo."

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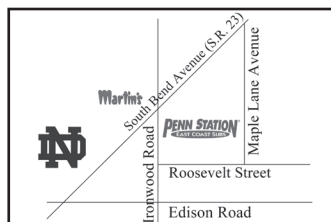
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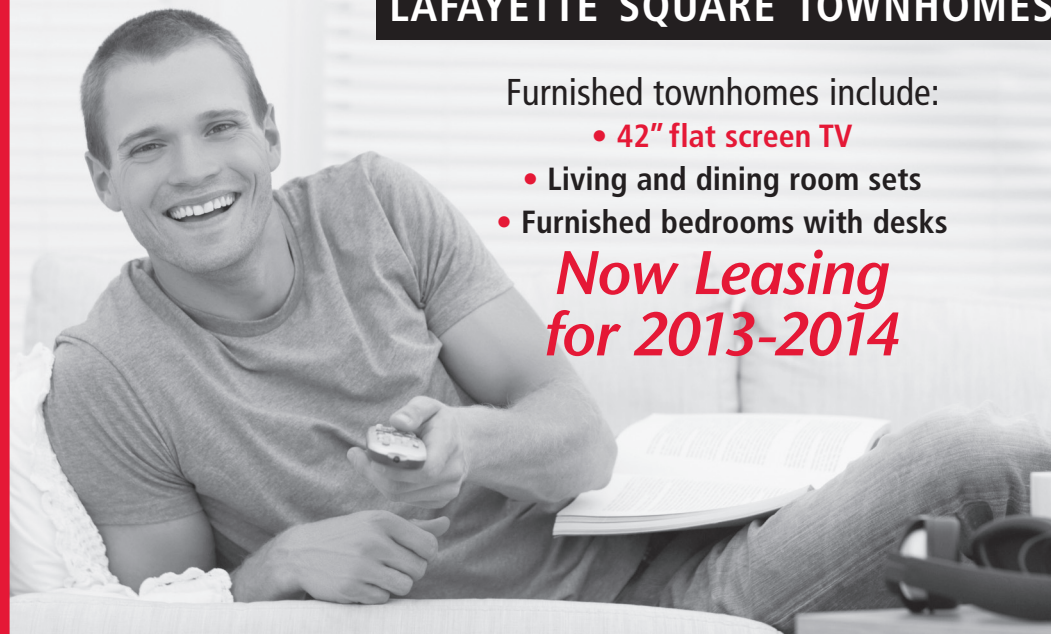
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Oklahoma offense features top QB Jones

By **ANDREW OWENS**
Assistant Managing Editor

A little over a month ago, Kansas State's defense stifled Oklahoma in a 24-19 Wildcat victory that handed Sooners coach Bob Stoops his fourth home loss in 14 years at the helm of the program.

Since then, Oklahoma quarterback Landry Jones has resembled the Heisman candidate he was projected to be at the beginning of the season, with seven touchdowns to just one interception during the Sooners' three-game winning streak. But Irish coach Brian Kelly said Jones is not the only reason for Oklahoma's offensive resurgence.

"It's the balance on offense," Kelly said. "It's not just Landry Jones. If it's just Landry Jones, then they're not where they are. It's their ability to run the football equally as well as throwing the football.

"The offense is certainly about Landry Jones, but more importantly it's the balance that they have."

Jones has been aided by the emergence of sophomore quarterback Blake Bell. Bell has become the de facto goal-line running back in recent weeks for the Sooners to the tune of

eight rushing touchdowns in four games, earning him the 'Belldozer' moniker. Bell stole the show in the Red River Shootout against Texas, when he scored four times on 11 rushes in a 63-21 rout of the Sooners' biggest rival.

"If it's first and goal from the five, we're going to have a hard time keeping them out of the end zone," Kelly said. "And so they bring [Bell] in ... and he's big. He's physical.

"So I would tell and I told our defensive coaches this: If he's on the field, we're going to have to do something really extraordinary, because he's a tough guy to stop. So, again, I think the way they use them, the circumstances and when he goes into the game, he's been very, very effective, especially in their short yardage goal line offense."

Irish senior linebacker Manti Te'o said the approach remains the same despite Bell's 6-foot-6, 254-pound frame.

"You just hit him. It's nothing different," Te'o said. "At the end of the day, you bring him to the ground. It's nothing different. He runs the same as anybody else. He's bigger than normal running backs, but that's football. It's nothing different."

But it's still Jones' job to take the offense into the red zone.

"I am a lot different now. I have been playing a lot better," said Jones, who passed up the NFL Draft to play his senior season at Oklahoma. "Obviously after games like Texas Tech, Texas and last week against Kansas, you are going to have a lot higher confidence and I think everyone on this team is going to have higher confidence because of the way we have been playing."

Oklahoma dropped to No. 16 in the AP poll after the home loss to Kansas State, who has risen to third in the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) rankings. With the momentum of a perfect October, the Sooners are back in the national championship picture with their No. 8 ranking in the BCS.

"That's where we want to be," Kelly said of the level to which Stoops has taken the program. "We want that consistency. Year-in and year-out you know Oklahoma is going to be part of the conversation. And that's where we want to get our football program."

Kelly and the Irish can take a substantial step to that end this weekend by slowing down Jones and keeping the 'Belldozer' out of the picture.

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Oklahoma senior quarterback Landry Jones throws a pass during Oklahoma's 41-20 win over Texas Tech on Oct. 6.

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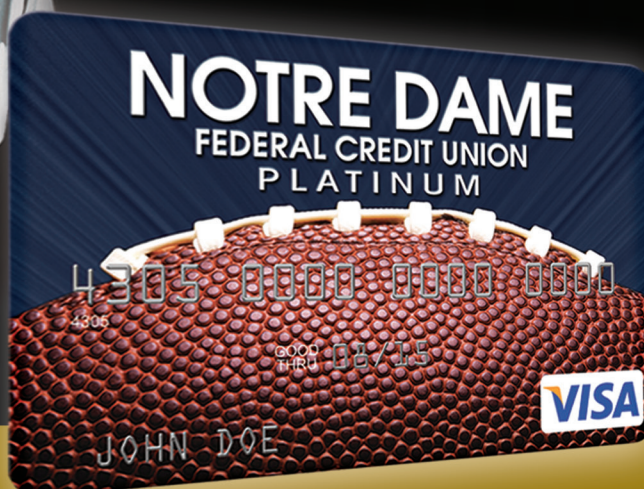
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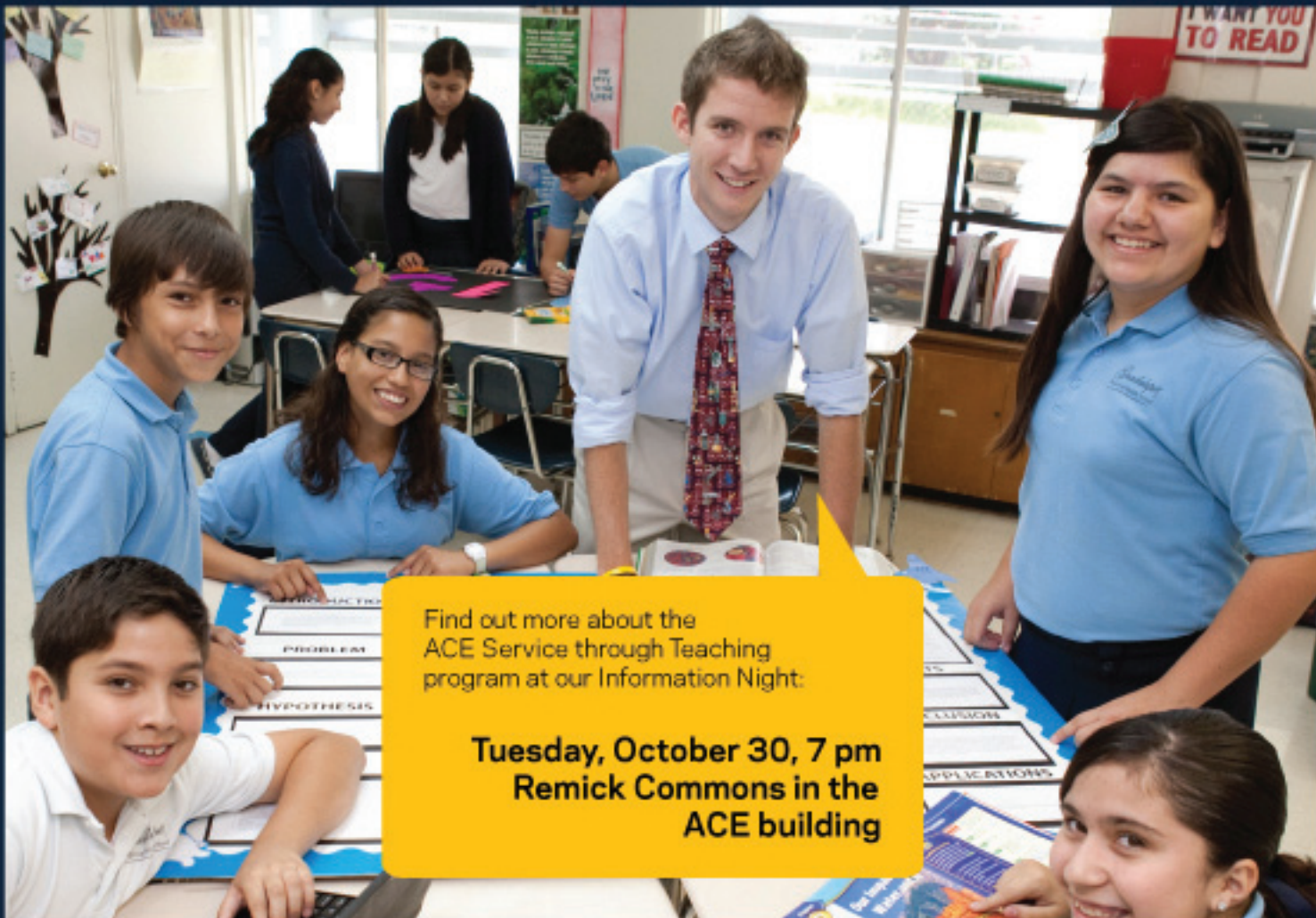
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