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Statement win



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Irish freshman wide receiver Chris Brown hauls in a pass that resulted in a 50-yard gain in the fourth quarter of Notre Dame's 30-13 victory over Oklahoma on Saturday. The catch, the first of Brown's career at Notre Dame, came with the score tied at 13-13 and led to a rushing touchdown by Irish sophomore quarterback Everett Golson.

By **ANDREW OWENS**
Assistant Managing Editor

NORMAN, Okla. — With the game and national championship implications on the line, Irish coach Brian Kelly placed his trust on the arm of Everett Golson. The sophomore heaved a strike through the chilly Oklahoma air to freshman receiver Chris Brown, who pulled it in for a 50-yard gain.

Five plays later, Golson dove into the end zone to put Notre Dame ahead for good in its 30-13 signature victory in Norman, Okla., on Saturday.

For Kelly, the gutsy play-action call, drawn up for a true freshman, was a no-brainer.

"I wanted to win the game," he said matter-of-factly after the game.

Notre Dame indeed won, and proved its validity as a national championship contender in the process.

"Our kids were confident," Kelly said. "They came in well prepared. I told them that I was very confident in their ability to go out on the road and play very good football.

"I thought that they exhibited that confidence in the first half and in the second half the focus was on

physical and mental toughness."

Before the game-winning, seven-play, 52-yard drive, Oklahoma backup quarterback Blake Bell knotted the score with a 1-yard touchdown run — the first rushing score Notre Dame had allowed since last November.

Though miffed after surrendering the touchdown, the defense still wasn't concerned about the game's outcome, graduate student defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore said.

"We're always confident in our offense," he said. "Whatever happens, happens."

But Golson showed a prime-time audience he's not the same quarterback that had struggled at times and been pulled in previous weeks.

"I don't think six or seven weeks ago I could've done something like that," he said. "I didn't have the same feel for the guys then."

Golson, who finished 13-of-25 passing for 177 yards and added 66 rushing yards, said he doesn't let the game situation influence his play. He saw Oklahoma in man-to-man coverage, and knew it was up to him and the freshman speedster to execute.

"We saw that they were in man

coverage and I think the play action set it up," he said. "[Brown] ended up winning with a great move and I just kind of stepped up in the pocket and gave it a little bit of air and let him run under."

After the Irish regained the lead, they sealed the victory on a deflected pass into the hands of senior linebacker Manti Te'o, his fifth interception of the season.

Officials reviewed the play and upheld the call, but Te'o didn't need to wait for their confirmation.

"[The coaches] came up to me and said, 'Did you catch it?' and I said, 'Yeah, I caught it,' he said. "It bobbled around a little bit, but I had possession of it."

Four rushes later, kicker Kyle Brindza converted a 46-yard field goal to give Notre Dame a 23-13 lead. The sophomore had missed a 35-yard attempt on the first drive of the second half after the Irish had driven 60 yards on 13 plays in a possession that lasted 6:54.

Brindza, who finished the game 3-for-4 on attempts, said the redemption was sweet.

"I tried to keep my head down," he said. "I was going to let the crowd tell me if it was good or not. I peeked up. It was just a weight lifted off of my shoulders. It felt really

good to see it go through."

Notre Dame controlled the tempo by outrushing Oklahoma to the count of 215 yards to the Sooners' 15. The Irish took a 7-3 lead in the first quarter when senior running back Cierre Wood burst through the middle for a 62-yard touchdown.

Moments before, on the game's first drive, the momentum was in Oklahoma's favor as the Sooners marched down the field for 42 yards on five plays before the drive was stalled by a snap that sailed past quarterback Landry Jones out of the shotgun formation. The Sooners recovered it, but lost 19 yards on the play and punted two plays later.

"We changed the play and there was miscommunication between myself and Landry," Oklahoma center Gabe Ikard said. "I snapped it when I normally snap it, and nothing good came from that. That was a huge drive kill for our team."

The game's most controversial sequence occurred late in the second quarter with the Sooners trailing 10-3. Bell rumbled into the end zone, but the play was called back due to a holding penalty. The Sooners settled for a field goal and

a 10-6 halftime deficit.

Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops was visibly livid after the call and voiced his frustration to the referees through the remainder of the half.

"We had it in the end zone, and it's a judgment call, they call holding," Stoops said. "Those are frustrating situations, but that's the way it is. We didn't get the calls."

With three games remaining before the season finale at USC and an undefeated season and possible berth in the national title game on the line, Kelly said the focus must shift to Pittsburgh, and only Pittsburgh.

"We'll lose," Kelly said bluntly about his team if it looks ahead. "If we start listening to national championship and BCS, we'll lose a football game."

"They're a pretty smart group and know if they start with what we've done and the process of preparing for Pittsburgh, they'll be fine. That's what I told them in the locker room — I said to enjoy a great victory against Oklahoma. Now let's find a way to beat Pittsburgh."

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REPORT CARD

A-

QUARTERBACKS

This was a coming-of-age game for sophomore Everett Golson. His numbers will not jump off the stat sheet, but Golson protected the ball and made big plays. Tommy Rees converted a key third-down on his only throw.

B+

RUNNING BACKS

The duo of seniors Theo Riddick and Cierre Wood didn't produce the eye-popping numbers of some previous weeks, but Wood started the scoring with a huge 62-yard run. Riddick ran hard to finish the game.

B+

RECEIVERS

It was receiving by committee yet again for the Irish, but T.J. Jones and Tyler Eifert stepped up yet again as Golson's top targets. Freshman Chris Brown turned in the play of the game in the fourth quarter, hauling in a 50-yard deep ball for his first career catch.

B+

OFFENSIVE LINE

The group got off to its usual slow start, but down the stretch physically dominated the line of scrimmage. Golson took only one sack and Wood ran through the line nearly untouched on his touchdown run.

B

DEFENSIVE LINE

The pressure on Landry Jones was not consistent but did just enough to stop him at the right times. Louis Nix dominated Oklahoma center Gabe Ikard to collapse the pocket and even hustled to make tackles down the field.

A-

LINEBACKERS

Manti Te'o continued to add to his Heisman resume with 11 tackles, a sack and an interception. His interception was crucial in preserving a fourth-quarter lead, but could not have happened without the coverage of Dan Fox. Fox and Danny Spond played well in coverage.

B+

DEFENSIVE BACKS

First, the obvious. Landry Jones threw for 356 yards — a season high. But the group of defensive backs played exactly to defensive coordinator Bob Diaco's game plan. Freshman KeiVarae Russell shined in open-field tackling.

B

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kyle Brindza missed a crucial field goal and Notre Dame failed to record punt return yardage, but Brindza's three field goals he did make were even more important. His 46-yard effort late sealed the win.

A

COACHING

Brian Kelly coached his best game in three seasons in charge of Notre Dame on Saturday. His bend-but-don't-break defense and offensive play calling were flawless.

OVERALL GPA: 3.40

On paper, no individual unit shined quite like the team did. The Irish were greater than the sum of their parts on Saturday. Solid offensive play, captained by Golson, and a brilliant defensive plan secured the win. Brian Kelly finally has his signature win, a triumph that will live on in Notre Dame's history books.

PLAY OF THE GAME

GOLSON'S 50-YARD PASS TO FRESHMAN CHRIS BROWN

After Oklahoma backup quarterback Blake Bell recorded the first rushing touchdown against the Notre Dame defense all season to knot the score at 13, Golson responded on the second play of the next drive with a long pass to the freshman Brown to set up a score.



ASHLEY DACY | The Observer

Senior linebacker Manti Te'o sacks Oklahoma quarterback Landry Jones. Te'o continued his productive senior season Saturday with 11 tackles, one sack and one interception.

It's not hype anymore: Te'o deserves the Heisman



Andrew Gastelum
Associate Sports Editor

NORMAN, Okla. — You know something special when you see it.

What we saw in primetime at Memorial Stadium, that was it.

A special victory at a special time, led by a special player.

For Manti Te'o, this is a special year. So it should be speculation no more: He deserves the Heisman.

This is a Notre Dame team that is 8-0, the only team in the country with four wins over top-25 teams — including two road wins over top-10 teams.

This is a Notre Dame team that was expected to struggle with a first-year quarterback and the toughest schedule in college football.

This is a Notre Dame team with one of the country's top defenses, giving up less than 10 points per game with only one rushing touchdown allowed since last November.

This is Te'o's team.

Most Heisman candidates represent their respective teams. Yet this Irish team represents Te'o, the best compliment a player can ask for. His incredible work ethic, his levelheadedness and his whole-is-greater-than-the-sum-of-its-parts mentality all shine through this team, from the veteran offensive line returning four starters to the young secondary with three players converted from offense.

This linebacker's influence can be heard, seen and felt on the field, even when he's not on it. The last time college football saw a player like that, Tim Tebow told the world no one would work as hard as he would for the rest of the season.

And on the biggest stage of his legendary career Saturday night, Te'o's legend grew.

When the Notre Dame offense could not sustain a drive of more than two minutes in the first quarter, Te'o recorded eight tackles and gave the offense a chance to find itself without having to play catch up. With one of those first-quarter tackles, Te'o recorded his 400th career tackle, just another testament to one of the greatest collegiate careers in Notre Dame history.

He finished the first half with 11 tackles — two for a loss — and his first sack of the season. That massive second-quarter sack by Te'o sent the up-tempo Oklahoma offense to the sidelines with its first three-and-out, right after it seemed to drive down the field with ease in the first quarter.

And with his sprawling fourth-quarter interception, Te'o silenced any chance of a Landry Jones-led comeback and sealed the victory, putting him tied for second in the entire country with five interceptions.

He hasn't thrown for four passing touchdowns and 300 yards. He hasn't even scored a touchdown at all. And yet he can change the course of an entire game from the side of the ball that prevents points, not scores them.

Since the preseason, Marcus Lattimore, Matt Barkley, E.J. Manuel, Geno Smith and now Kansas State quarterback Collin Klein have all taken their turns atop the presumptive Heisman list.

Since his inspired performance at Michigan State in Week 3, Te'o has remained near the top of that list and improved his status while

watching the frontrunner crash out on weekly basis.

While one loss can ruin the Heisman hopes of Klein — as it did to Barkley, Manuel and Smith — a loss for Te'o will not muffle the Heisman noise. He simply means too much to the sport.

And as we've seen with Robert Griffin III, Mark Ingram and Tebow, it's not just about the stat sheet.

"He represents all of the things the Heisman trophy espouses: integrity, character, a great football player," Irish coach Brian Kelly said postgame.

The way he inspired an island, a university and a nation through personal tragedy showed the character of a true champion. The stories of helping a young and dying cancer patient and her family showed the integrity of a true hero. The answer to the following question showed the linebacker's heart.

"Have you been able to comprehend the number of people that you have affected in a positive manner?" I asked Te'o after the game.

His response was swift.

"No, not really," he replied. "For me, I'm just trying to have an impact on as many people as possible. If that's one, if that's 10 or 20 I don't really know. As long as I change somebody's life, I would consider that a success for me."

His words read of honor, humility and sacrifice, but all I read was Heisman.

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

Irish defense displays resiliency against Jones



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Junior linebacker Prince Shembo attempts to get past a Sooner lineman. Shembo recorded one of two Irish sacks on the night. The Irish defense held the high-powered Oklahoma offense to 13 points.

By **ANDREW GASTELUM**
Associate Sports Editor

NORMAN, Okla. — Since day one, the Notre Dame defense has adopted a bend-but-don’t-break defensive philosophy. Against the most explosive offense they have seen all year, the Irish stuck to their guns.

“That [bend-don’t-break] was the way it was set up,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said. “It’s been a consistent part of why we’re here. Week in and week out, we’ve structured the gameplan to keep the points down. We were willing to give up yardage in the passing game today just to keep the points down. We’re not offensively at a point where can score like Oklahoma. I thought Bob Diaco and the defense did a great job with the plan and it proved to be a good one.”

Notre Dame came into the primetime showdown with the 15th best rushing defense in the country, giving up 106.71 rushing yards per game. Against the Sooners, the Irish allowed just 15 rushing yards, while limiting the Sooners to 4-for-14 on third-down conversions.

“That always is tough when you’re not able to run it and when you throw it more than you want,” Sooners coach Bob Stoops said.

Sooners senior quarterback

Landry Jones threw for a season-high 356 yards on 35-for-51 passing, but the Irish held him without a touchdown and limited Oklahoma’s big-play ability — the Sooners’ biggest gain was a 35-yard pass from Jones to junior receiver Jalen Saunders.

“We sensed some frustration and we understood [their inability to break a big play],” senior linebacker Manti Te’o said. “We just had to play our ballgame. Everybody do their job and hopefully everything works.”

Despite holding the Sooners to 184 yards below their season average on the ground, the Irish gave up their first rushing touchdown of the season when sophomore quarterback Blake Bell bulldozed his way into the end zone on a one-yard run with just over nine minutes left in the fourth quarter to tie the game at 13.

“Yeah we gave up a rushing touchdown, but we came away with a ‘W’ and that’s more important,” graduate student defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore said.

Bell’s rushing touchdown was the first given up by the Irish in 41 quarters, dating back to a 16-14 win over Boston College on Nov. 19, 2011.

“Man, I was just frustrated that they got in the end zone,” Te’o said. “I didn’t care if it was a pass or run. They got in the end zone

and that’s the point right there. “[Bend-but-don’t-break] defense worked pretty good. Obviously we gave up a touchdown. I think with this defense, when somebody scores we get really frustrated. It showed our maturity about how we rallied after that touchdown. We just kept going and I’m very proud of our guys.”

Lining up against a talented veteran receiving corps just two months after converting from running back, freshman cornerback KeiVarae Russell led the Irish secondary with nine tackles.

“There’s a young man that keeps getting better and keeps competing,” Kelly said. “Who would’ve thought a true freshman would be able to go out and do the things he’s done? He’s been so instrumental in what we’re doing on the back end of the defense.”

To Te’o, the effort was just another showcase of Notre Dame’s defensive strength and mental fortitude.

“We knew what we could do,” Te’o said. “Today is no surprise. We knew that if we came in to work, if we came into today with confidence and everybody doing their job, we would be fine.”

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ND wins on the ground

By **ANDREW OWENS**
Assistant Managing Editor

NORMAN, Okla. — The high-powered Sooner offense possessed the ball for 10:04 in the first quarter, but only 17:28 of the final 45 minutes as the No. 5 Irish controlled the tempo for most of their 30-13 win at No. 8 Oklahoma on Saturday.

With its 215 rushing yards compared to Oklahoma’s 15, Notre Dame won its 12th consecutive game when accumulating 200-plus yards on the ground. The Irish are 39-2

since the start of the 2005 season when outrushing their opponent.

“The team that would win this game would control it in that manner,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said. “I thought we did it. The third quarter was huge for us. We controlled the football and limited the possessions for Oklahoma.”

Running away

Irish senior running back Cierre Wood jumpstarted the Irish offense with a 62-yard rushing touchdown in the

first quarter. It was the longest career of and topped a previous best of 55 yards at Purdue in 2011. Wood’s run was the team’s longest since Jonas Gray’s 79-yard score at Pittsburgh last season.

“The one early touchdown was a big play,” Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops said. “They made some key plays that way that picked up first downs and helped move the football for them.”

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SCORING SUMMARY

	1 ST	2 ND	3 RD	4 TH	TOTAL
	3	3	0	7	13
	7	3	0	20	30

1 OKLAHOMA 3, NOTRE DAME 0
Mike Hunnicutt 28-yard field goal
⌚ **7:12** remaining
Drive: 9 plays, 71 yards, 3:04 elapsed

NOTRE DAME 7, OKLAHOMA 3
Cierre Wood 62-yard run (Brindza kick)
⌚ **6:24** remaining
Drive: 2 plays, 67 yards, 0:41 elapsed

2 NOTRE DAME 10, OKLAHOMA 3
Kyle Brindza 34-yard field goal
⌚ **5:58** remaining
Drive: 13 plays, 64 yards, 5:46 elapsed

NOTRE DAME 10, OKLAHOMA 6
Mike Hunnicutt 30-yard field goal
⌚ **0:43** remaining
Drive: 14 plays, 66 yards, 5:07 elapsed

NO SCORING DRIVES

3 NOTRE DAME 13, OKLAHOMA 6
Kyle Brindza 44-yard field goal
⌚ **13:57** remaining
Drive: 13 plays, 70 yards, 5:44 elapsed

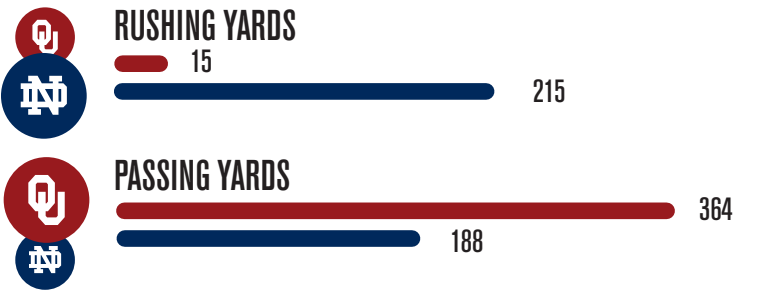
NOTRE DAME 13, OKLAHOMA 13
Blake Bell 1-yard run (Hunnicutt kick)
⌚ **9:10** remaining
Drive: 7 plays, 52 yards, 2:45 elapsed

NOTRE DAME 20, OKLAHOMA 13
Everett Golson 1-yard run (Brindza kick)
⌚ **5:05** remaining
Drive: 7 plays, 73 yards, 4:00 elapsed

NOTRE DAME 23, OKLAHOMA 13
Kyle Brindza 46-yard field goal
⌚ **3:22** remaining
Drive: 5 plays, 16 yards, 1:05 elapsed

NOTRE DAME 30, OKLAHOMA 13
Theo Riddick 15-yard run (Brindza kick)
⌚ **1:36** remaining
Drive: 3 plays, 20 yards, 0:55 elapsed

STATISTICS





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Senior running back Theo Riddick runs celebrates a fourth-quarter touchdown run in Notre Dame's 30-13 victory over Oklahoma on Saturday. Riddick's visit to the end zone capped the scoring in the contest with 1:36 remaining in the game. Riddick was Notre Dame's leading rusher with 74 yards, tied with fellow senior Cierre Wood.

STOPPING THE SOONERS

In a much anticipated matchup of top-10 teams in Norman, Okla., it was the Irish who delivered a statement win to stay undefeated on the 2012 season. Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson had 177 yards passing and 64 yards on the ground in a nearly mistake-free performance. The Notre Dame defense continued its strong run, keeping vaunted passer Landry Jones at bay the whole game.



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Sophomore kick returner Cam McDaniel sheds an Oklahoma player in the open field.



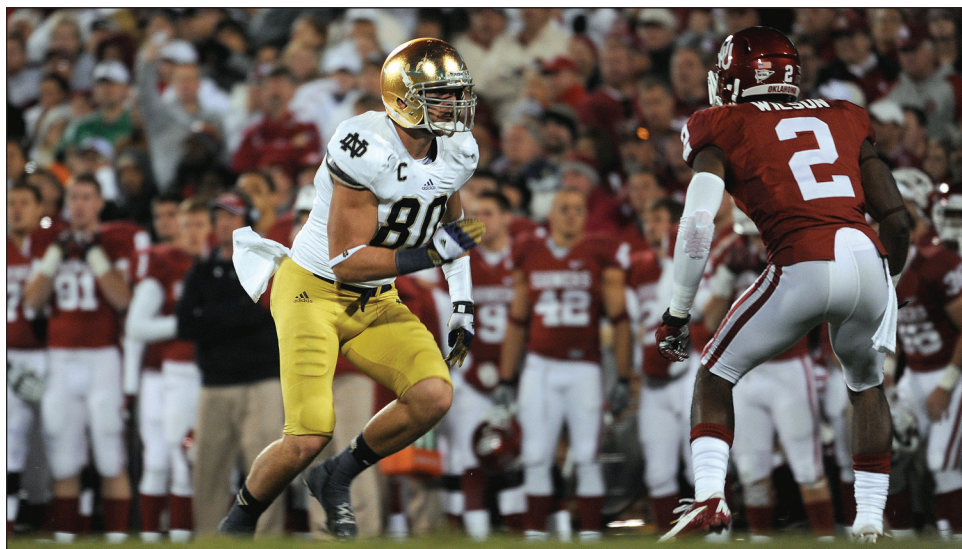
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Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson hands the ball off to senior running back Theo Riddick.



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Senior running back Cierre Wood breaks free on his first-quarter touchdown run to open the Irish scoring.



ASHLEY DACY | The Observer

Senior tight end Tyler Eifert breaks off the line of scrimmage against an Oklahoma defender. Eifert had three catches for 22 yards against the Sooners.



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Senior safety Zeke Motta, right, and graduate student defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore celebrate during Notre Dame's victory on the road against Oklahoma.