

# IRISH INSIDER

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2012



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THE OBSERVER

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## COMMENTARY

# Eifert holds key to offensive success



**Chris Allen**  
Sports Editor

Welcome to a three-game mini-season inside the 2012 football season. Three games, three inferior opponents and three chances for a crushing loss that derails national championship dreams.

Cellar-dwelling ACC teams Boston College and Wake Forest await, but first up is Pittsburgh. Just as the Eagles and Demon Deacons will, Pittsburgh gears up to play its best game against the Irish in the hopes of playing spoiler to a rival's BCS dreams.

How can the Irish escape this three-game stretch unscathed? If recent form is any indication, the Irish defense will have little trouble keeping the opposing offenses out of the end zone and off the scoreboard. The formula to avoid a cataclysmic upset begins and ends with the offensive production, and that production runs through one player. If the Irish are to get to where they want to be heading to USC — and beyond that, if they are to achieve their postseason goals — they must utilize the best tight end in college football: Tyler Eifert.

Before the 2012 season, most media outlets singled out two Notre Dame players as pre-season All-Americans: Eifert and Manti Te'o. The similarities in their seasons end there. While Te'o has been the visible face of the program, earning national acclaim and Heisman Trophy consideration, Eifert has toiled in near obscurity and battled through constant double-teams. But make no mistake — Eifert is the key to Notre Dame's offense whether he touches the ball or not. He will be absolutely instrumental to avoiding upset losses over the next three weeks, going into the L.A. Coliseum and defeating USC or even besting a powerhouse like Alabama or Oregon in a BCS game. If the Irish are to do these things, Eifert must play like an All-American, with or without the ball.

"You know, Tyler ... he impacts our offense incredibly," Irish coach Brian Kelly said Oct. 6 after defeating Miami.

"They are paying a lot of attention to him and it's opened up a lot of things."

As the season wears on into the month of November, the physical nature of every football game is tested. These are the games that are won on the ground, at the line of scrimmage. The ability of Notre Dame's offensive coaching staff to line up a tight end at wide receiver — one with the skill set to demand constant double-teams on the outside — has opened up the Irish running game and enabled the offensive line to establish its physical presence on football games.

More than anything, Eifert's 2012 season has shown the impact of Irish coach Brian Kelly's program on an individual level. An All-American with only 22 catches through eight games? Players in many programs, especially a receiving position, would have opened their mouths to grumble a long time ago. But Eifert has worked even harder in sacrificing his individual statistics for the good of the team. Against Oklahoma, there he was again blocking two Sooner defenders on Cierre Wood's 62-yard touchdown in the first quarter. This is a player recruited by Charlie Weis, but who embodies the Brian Kelly program with every action he takes. The leadership on this team is more than just Te'o — Eifert is showing it too.

Being undefeated this late in the season is uncharted territory for nearly all of the people involved in the Notre Dame football program in 2012. When it gets to crunch time, if this team is to be great, great players will need to make great plays.

Notre Dame is, first and foremost, a team. But it is a team with many exceptional players. Tyler Eifert is one of these players. For Notre Dame to raise a crystal football, No. 80 must sparkle brighter than the trophy he hopes to hoist.

Contact Chris Allen at [callen10@nd.edu](mailto:callen10@nd.edu)

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

## RECRUITING

# Notre Dame to reload at tight end with Heuerman

By **CHRIS ALLEN**  
Sports Editor

With current Notre Dame senior tight end Tyler Eifert eligible to enter the NFL Draft at the end of the 2012 season, the Irish are set to replenish the talent pipeline at the position after the April commitment of ESPN300 recruit Mike Heuerman.

The 6-foot-4 Heuerman, the No. 6 tight end in the 2013 recruiting class according to ESPN, is a player that will fit right in with the tradition of top receiving tight ends at Notre Dame, Irish recruiting expert Mike Frank said.

"[Heuerman's] got great speed to get vertical, which is what makes Tyler Eifert such a great player," said Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliated Irish Sports Daily. "He can put a lot of stress on safeties. He's got that kind of physical ability. He's not as tall as Eifert, but he can still make that signature acrobatic catch. A lot of people will be surprised at how well he's going to do."

Frank said Heuerman, who hails from Naples, Fla., possesses the confidence and mentality that made him an ideal fit for Irish coach Brian Kelly's program.

"Heuerman is the epitome of what Kelly wants in a football player. He is, when you watch him on the field, he's the toughest kid

out there," Frank said. "There's just no question. He's the most physical, he's the most mentally tough and he goes 100 miles an hour every single play."

"He's also got that confidence about him that great players have, even along the borderline of swagger or cockiness. To be honest, that's not a bad thing. The best players have that. It's something that drives them."

Upon signing with the Irish, Heuerman will be the latest in a long line of under-the-radar tight end recruits to join the Notre Dame ranks. Former Irish tight ends — and current NFL players — Anthony Fasano, John Carlson and even All-American Eifert were not blue-chip recruits but had great success in an Irish uniform. Frank said the Irish tradition of producing great tight end talent was a huge factor in Heuerman's commitment.

"I think the Notre Dame tight end tradition is a big reason why Heuerman committed. I think the way Notre Dame uses its tight ends was attractive to him," Frank said. "He loves the biggest stage possible, too. He's got that Everett Golson-like attitude where the bigger stage the better it is for him. Then obviously there is the education, and the things you can do after graduation with that Notre Dame degree which

was very attractive to him."

With Heuerman in the fold added to a group of more physical, blocking-type tight ends in junior Alex Welch and sophomore Troy Niklas, Frank said the future Notre Dame tight end corps is going to be very diverse.

"It's going to be very interesting to see where things go once Eifert leaves. There's a lot of different people in play," he said. "When you look at Heuerman, he's your [New England Patriots tight end] Rob Gronkowski-type player who is going to, like Eifert, line up out wide and push down the field in the vertical passing game. Now, Alex Welch, coming back from his injury, is going to be a devastating blocker. He can do a lot of things helping the run game and catching balls in that 10-to-17 yard range."

"But what you'll probably see more than anything is Troy Niklas evolving into a pass-catching threat and be a factor in both aspects of the offense."

*For more on Notre Dame recruiting, check out Mike Frank's [irishsportsdaily.com](http://irishsportsdaily.com)*

*Email Mike at [mikefrank18@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mikefrank18@sbcglobal.net) and tell him The Observer sent you.*

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# MAKING IT COUNT

*Tyler Eifert returns to Notre Dame for his senior season to lead Irish offense*

By **ANDREW GASTELUM**  
Associate Sports Editor

Last December, the process began. Tyler Eifert filled out the NFL Draft evaluation paperwork and endlessly ran through both scenarios in his head. To return or leave, that was the grueling question.

“I was really close,” the senior tight end said. “It was kind of different every day, but at some points I was about to go.”

Despite projections as a second- or third-round pick from draft experts, Eifert found it too difficult to leave an opportunity to graduate with a degree from Notre Dame and, ultimately, the lasting bonds he built.

“I wanted to make sure I had my degree,” Eifert said. “I wasn’t very far away from that and I wanted to get that. And you only get this shot one time and I didn’t want to cut it short.

“I’ve had too much fun here being a kid with my friends and developing a good relationship with my coaches. I just wasn’t ready to grow up, I guess.”

Eifert credits his mentor, former Notre Dame and current Minnesota Vikings tight end Kyle Rudolph, with guiding him throughout the process. Since Rudolph opted for the NFL Draft following his junior year — he was selected in the second round with the 43rd pick — Eifert said he confided in Rudolph to help him make the decision that suited him best.

“I still stay in contact with Rudy,” Eifert said. “He left early, so I went to him a lot last year for advice. And even this year, just about the process because I had never been through it.”

When he hears his name called at Radio City Music Hall this April, Eifert said he isn’t sure how he will react, only that the NFL

won’t change the player he has unremittingly worked so hard to become.

“Nothing will change from the NFL-me to the college-me,” he said. “I’m just going to come to work, do my job and have fun doing it. I’m just going to do my best to put myself in the best position to get drafted as high as possible.”

But for a co-captain on a team ranked third in the Bowl Championship Series, there is ample reason to push that thought aside.

“I’m not really thinking about [the NFL] because there is a lot left to play,” Eifert said. “We’re 8-0 so everyone is feeling pretty good, including myself.”

## Three-star to All-American

Coming out of Bishop Dwenger High School in Fort Wayne, Ind., Eifert was labeled as a low-level three-star recruit and received offers from Big Ten schools such as Indiana, Northwestern and Purdue.

“There wasn’t really [a chip on my shoulder],” Eifert said. “I’ve always believed in myself, but I’ve tried to stay level whether that’s good or bad and tried to be the same guy everyday.

“I’ve done my best to be a good teammate and put in a lot of hard work for the past few years. I was going to work hard and try to play if I really had [the opportunity].”

That opportunity came midway through his sophomore year, when Rudolph tore his hamstring that required season-ending surgery. In his first start, Eifert caught four passes for 72 yards and a touchdown. Since then, the 6-foot-6 tight end has started in 29 consecutive games for the Irish, motivated by a single fear only he can control.

“The thought of failing and of not doing well, I hate that,” he said. “Just to come out and work

hard and put yourself in the best position to succeed makes me feel good.”

Eifert has turned into one of the premier receiving threats in the Kelly era, totaling 1,496 yards on 112 receptions and 10 touchdowns.

“Here’s what I love about Tyler Eifert: You know you’re moving your program along when your best players are your best workers,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said in August. “He’s just been incredible to work with over the past couple of years, to see his development and his maturity. He’s a leader on our football team.

“When I first got here, he was in the back row. He was two or three rows back. Now he’s up front. So you can understand from my perspective that’s exciting when your best player, one of your best players has that kind of desire to be the best.”

By the time he was a senior, Eifert had been named a Notre Dame captain, a finalist for the 2011 Mackey Award — given to the nation’s top tight end — and a second-team All-American with NFL potential. If someone would have told him this on Signing Day in 2009, Eifert said he would have come across as more than skeptical.

“I’d probably say I’ll believe it when it happens,” he said. “I was one of the lower-rated guys coming in from our class, so I would have never expected it ... It’s pretty cool. I’ve waited my turn and worked hard. Coming from that to where I am today, it’s pretty awesome.”

## Becoming the target

In his breakout junior season, Eifert caught 63 passes for 803 yards and five touchdowns. But with the departure of Michael Floyd, Eifert slid into the role of playmaker, making him the

No. 1 target for opposing defenses.

“[Getting double-teamed] is tough,” he said. “Last year against Pitt they wouldn’t let [Floyd] open and they had two guys on him. So that allowed me to make some plays. This year [teams] are double-teaming me so it allows other guys to make some plays.”

Although he amassed a career-high 98 receiving yards against his childhood-favorite Purdue on Sept. 8, Eifert’s numbers (341 yards, three touchdowns) have dropped from where they were a year ago. But that hasn’t affected the tight end’s ability to positively affect the offense in making his mark in run-blocking and drawing attention away from Irish receivers.

“Eif is one of those guys that’s very dependable,” senior captain Manti Te’o said before facing BYU. “He’s not a mean player. He’s not a selfish player. Obviously Eif is the best tight end in college football. He hasn’t had the kind of receptions and numbers that he would like, but you never would see Tyler complaining. As long as we’re winning, he’s happy. He leads by example. He leads by his work ethic, and just really, really doing his best to ensure that our team wins.”

One thing that defenses cannot take away from the preseason All-American is his unmitigated calm and poise, put on full display as he took the field in the fourth quarter with the Irish tied at 13 with No. 8 Oklahoma.

“You can only control what you can do, so I don’t let a lot of other things affect me,” Eifert said of his composure. “As long as I stay under control and levelheaded, that’ll give me my best chance to be my best.”

Just as Rudolph and John Carlson before him, Eifert recognizes that he must fulfill his role as mentor to the newest crop

of tight ends: four-star recruits in junior Alex Welch and sophomores Ben Koyack and Troy Niklas.

“I know that I’ve been in that position so I know how they are feeling and I can relate to them a lot of times and help them with a lot,” Eifert said. “I’ve never really thought about [how important I am to their success]. I just try to be a good teammate and do what I can to help. It will be cool to see them down the road.”

Niklas made the switch to tight end in the spring, after seeing the field in all 12 games last season at outside linebacker. The 6-foot-7, 260-pound converted linebacker said Eifert has been an active source of support in helping him learn the intricacies of the Kelly offense.

“He’s an All-American so he’s been there,” Niklas said. “It’s really good to have someone who you can see do it because sometimes it’s hard to know what coach is talking about. When you can see someone do it right, you know what to do. It just makes the learning process so much faster. If I ever have a question, I can just talk to him and just ask him.”

For Eifert, the starting job entails the preservation of a long-standing tradition of NFL-quality Notre Dame tight ends, earning the program the nickname: ‘Tight End U.’

“If you look down the line, we’ve had some really good tight ends in the past decade and going even further back,” Eifert said. “So it’s pretty cool to be a part of that. We recognize it for sure.”

And for Eifert, it also entails the compelling vindication for returning for his senior season.

“I love Notre Dame and I love playing football here.”

**Contact Andrew Gastelum at agastell1@nd.edu**



DE KENESEY | The Observer

*Notre Dame senior tight end Tyler Eifert passed up the NFL to return for his senior season with the Irish.*



# Niklas adjusts to new position



MACKENZIE SAIN | The Observer

Sophomore Troy Niklas, pictured in Notre Dame's 41-3 win over Miami, has made the transition from linebacker to tight end.

By **MATTHEW DeFRANKS**  
Associate Sports Editor

At 6-feet-7, 260 pounds, sophomore tight end Troy Niklas is a big guy, even for football. His monstrous size has made way for a historic nickname — Hercules.

"It's whatever," Niklas said of the nickname. "[My] name's Troy but if you want to call me that, it's fine."

After playing offensive tackle in high school, outside linebacker as a freshman, Niklas transitioned to tight end last spring.

Niklas said he was optimistic about the switch.

"[My mentality] was just roll with it, I was pretty excited about it," Niklas said. "I felt like it was a good position for me."

As an offensive tackle in high school, the Anaheim, Calif., native was ranked in the top 25 nationally at his position by Rivals.com. He also played tight end in high school. Niklas said his background on the offensive line helps him in blocking.

During Notre Dame's 20-13 win over Stanford, Niklas struggled at times to handle the Cardinal pass rush, giving up a sack. But Kelly said the sophomore's experience against a good pass rush helped him develop.

"He was challenged and wasn't taken out of the game at any point. He was right in the thick of it. We put him in a role that some could argue was a difficult one for him to succeed

in," Kelly said in the week leading up to the BYU game. "But he was there when we won late and contributed greatly to the success in the last drive where we were able to run the football effectively."

Niklas has been used primarily as a run blocker this season, but he said he does not consider himself a sixth offensive lineman.

Niklas said he expects his involvement in the aerial attack to increase in 2013 with the departure of senior tight end Tyler Eifert.

"I think that this year I'm being used a lot as a blocking tight end just because we have Tyler," Niklas said. "It's easy for me to protect and block. I think that next year I think I'll be able to get out there and run more routes."

Through eight games this season, Niklas has four catches for 68 yards, including two receptions of more than 25 yards. His production has dropped off recently, with just two catches for nine yards in his past six games.

Despite his dip in numbers, Niklas remains an integral part of an Irish offense that relies on the rushing attack to generate points and wins.

"I'd say it's been a pretty smooth transition," Niklas said. "The entire position is very natural for me. I've just steadily progressed throughout the year."

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## BCS OUTLOOK THE ROAD TO MIAMI



### NO. 1 ALABAMA (8-0)

**Last Week:** 38-7 win over No. 11 Mississippi State  
**Remaining games:** at No. 5 LSU, Texas A&M, Western Carolina, Auburn



### NO. 2 KANSAS STATE (8-0)

**Last Week:** 55-24 win over No. 14 Texas Tech  
**Remaining games:** No. 24 Oklahoma State, at TCU, at Baylor, No. 23 Texas



## NO. 3 NOTRE DAME



### NO. 4 OREGON (8-0)

**Last Week:** 70-14 win over Colorado  
**Remaining games:** at No. 17 USC, at California, No. 14 Stanford, at No. 11 Oregon State



### NO. 5 LSU (7-1)

**Last week:** Idle  
**Remaining games:** No. 1 Alabama, No. 15 Mississippi State, Ole Miss, at Arkansas

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# Eifert continues tradition of great tight ends



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Irish senior tight end Tyler Eifert blocks an Oklahoma defender during Notre Dame's 30-13 win over the Sooners on Saturday at Memorial Stadium in Norman, Okla. Eifert is the latest in a long line of successful Notre Dame tight ends.

By **CHRIS ALLEN**  
Sports Editor

The tradition of elite tight ends at Notre Dame is one that stretches as far back as the 1970s. Along the way, the program has produced Super Bowl champions and NFL Hall of Famers at tight end. But NFL Draft expert Scott Wright said current Notre Dame senior tight end Tyler Eifert has the potential to be one of the best the school has ever produced.

"Notre Dame, you can basically call it 'Tight End U' with the way it has been producing tight ends in recent years, even going way back to the Mark Bavaro years," said Wright, who runs NFL Draft Countdown. "Tyler Eifert has been doing more than his part to keep that tradition going. I don't think it's even a question that he's the top draft-eligible tight end in the country this year."

In the 1970s and 1980s, when

football demanded a more physical, blue-collar role at tight end, the Irish developed NFL — and College Football — Hall of Fame inductee Dave Casper among many top players. But in the modern game, where the tight end position is more geared to the passing game, Wright said Eifert is a prototypical prospect.

"Eifert definitely fits the mold of a modern tight end, fits what NFL teams are looking for," Wright said. "The elite

guys in the pro game, [Rob] Gronkowski and [Jimmy] Graham are built almost like small forwards in basketball. Eifert compares very favorably with those guys in terms of his body type.

"He's an extremely impressive athlete. He's got that tall, rangy frame with the long arms and in a lot of ways has the skill set of a wide receiver in a tight end's body — reminds me a lot of [Cincinnati Bengals tight end] Jermaine

Gresham. That's because not only are they threats in the passing game that can stretch the field vertically and split the seam, but they're both better blockers than people give them credit for."

Eifert comes as the latest in a line of four elite tight ends to wear an Irish uniform in the last decade, following current NFL tight ends Anthony Fasano, John Carlson and Kyle Rudolph. Irish recruiting expert Mike Frank said the run of tight end talent began when current Irish assistant coach Mike Denbrock joined former Irish coach Tyrone Willingham's staff in 2002.

"Denbrock did a good job identifying some lesser-knowns that ended up being really good players," Frank said. "Denbrock did a good job of not only identifying the talent but developing [Carlson and Fasano]. You pass on that skill to guys like Rudolph and now you have Tyler Eifert. It kind of builds. It's been a nice tradition of really effective players at Notre Dame at that position."

Though Fasano, Carlson and Rudolph all contribute on a weekly basis in the NFL, Wright said Eifert will be in a class of his own when he leaves Notre Dame.

"Eifert is obviously a much different type of player than the last three guys to come out of Notre Dame to the NFL at that position, especially Rudolph and Fasano," Wright said. "The best comparison is to Carlson, but Eifert is a better player. He's faster, he's bigger and he's a better pass catcher. All three of those guys were second-round picks and that is a worst-case scenario for Eifert. He's the best of the four coming out."

After making the offseason decision to come back to school for his senior season, Wright said Eifert dedicated himself to improving his blocking and has been better in that area.

"He's not an overwhelming blocker, and there's always room to improve there," Wright said. "I still think he is a better blocker than people give him credit for. But when teams write checks to tight ends, they're usually looking for guys who can catch touchdowns and move the chains."

Despite occasional concerns about Eifert's blocking and injury concerns dating to a major 2009 back injury, Frank said there is no doubt the modern "Tight End U" has produced its finest player.

"Out of those four guys — Fasano, Carlson, Rudolph and Eifert ... I would take Eifert over all of those guys," he said. "I don't think people realize just how good of a pro he is going to be."

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SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

PANTHERS PASSING

He may not be the top quarterback Notre Dame has faced all year, but red-shirt senior quarterback Tino Sunseri has been a model of consistency for the Panthers. Sunseri has started 34 consecutive games for the Panthers and ranks fourth in Pittsburgh history with 7,501 passing yards. Sunseri has thrown for 2,199 yards, 13 touchdowns and two interceptions this season. The redshirt senior comes into his second meeting with the Irish ranking eighth in the country and first in the Big East in pass efficiency with a 164.8 rating. Sunseri carries an active streak of 143 pass attempts without an interception. His last interception came in a 35-17 upset win over No. 13 Virginia Tech on Sept. 15. His 283-yard, three-touchdown performance against the Hokies earned him Big East Offensive Player of the Week honors. In a 47-17 win over Temple on Saturday, Sunseri threw for 321 yards and three touchdowns on 20-for-28 passing. In the last six games, Sunseri has completed 71 percent of his passes for 11 touchdowns and 1,682 passing yards, for an average of 280.3 yards per game.

Sunseri’s favorite targets are junior receiver Devin Street and redshirt senior Mike Shanahan. Street currently leads the Big East in receiving yards and receptions per game, averaging 86.9 yards and 6.3 receptions per game. Street has totaled 695 yards and four touchdowns on 50 receptions, averaging 13.9 yards per catch. Shanahan, a team co-captain, has recorded 37 receptions for 631 yards and three touchdowns. Shanahan posted back-to-back 100-yard receiving games earlier this season and ranks fifth in Panthers history with 134 career receptions.

Although it gave up 356 passing yards to Oklahoma senior quarterback Landry Jones, the Notre Dame defense held the former Heisman candidate to no touchdowns. In fact, the Irish defense has yet to give up a first-quarter touchdown all year. Senior linebacker Manti Te’o recorded his fifth interception of the season Saturday, putting him tied for second in the NCAA. Te’o also recorded his first sack of the season and led the Irish with 11 tackles.

Freshman cornerback may have had his best performance this season, with nine tackles and steady pass coverage. Sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt leads the Irish with 8.5 sacks.

EDGE: EVEN

PANTHERS RUSHING

Senior running back Ray Graham is the latest in prominent Panthers running backs in the last few years, which include LeSean McCoy and Dion Lewis. Graham ranks fifth in career rushing yards at Pittsburgh wiht 2,851. Graham has rushed for 622 yards and seven touchdowns this season. In last season’s 15-12 loss to Notre Dame on Sept. 24, 2011, Graham rushed for 89 yards on 21 carries.

Despite giving up its first rushing touchdown of the year to Oklahoma sophomore quarterback Blake Bell, the Irish defense held a Sooners offense averaging close to 200 rushing yards per game to 15.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

PANTHERS OFFENSIVE COACHING

Defensive coordinator Bob Diaco stuck to a bend-but-don’t-break gameplan against the Sooners, and his defense executed it to near-perfection on the biggest stage Saturday night.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

PANTHERS SPECIAL TEAMS

Redshirt senior kicker Kevin Harper made two field goals last week against Temple and has made six of his last seven attempts. Redshirt freshman Lafayette Pitts leads the Big East with 27.76 yards per return.

EDGE: PITTSBURGH

PANTHERS SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	Youngstown State	L 31-17
Sept. 8	@ Cincinnati	L 34-10
Sept. 15	Virginia Tech	W 35-14
Sept. 22	Gardner-Webb	W 55-10
Oct. 5	@ Syracuse	L 14-13
Oct. 13	Louisville	L 45-35
Oct. 20	@ Buffalo	W 20-6
Oct. 27	Temple	W 47-17
Nov. 3	@ Notre Dame	
Nov. 9	@ Connecticut	
Nov. 24	Rutgers	
Dec. 1	@ USF	

# HEAD T

PITTSBURGH



(R-Sr.) Mike Shanahan **87** WR  
(R-Sr.) Cameron Saddler 5

(R-Jr.) Cory King **78** LT  
(Fr.) Adam Bisnowaty 69

(Sr.) Ray Graham **1** RB  
(Fr.) Rushel Shell 4

(R-Sr.) Chris Jacobson **54** LG  
(R-So.) Arthur Doakes 56

(R-Sr.) Tino Sunseri **12** QB  
(So.) Trey Anderson 10

(R-Sr.) Ryan Turnley **75** C  
(R-Fr.) Artie Rowell 57

(R-So.) Mark Giubilato **43** FB  
(R-So.) Adam Lazenga 46

(R-So.) Arthur Doakes **76** RG  
(R-So.) Shane Johnson 64

(R-So.) Matt Rotheram **74** RT  
(R-Jr.) Zenel Demhasaj 52

(R-Sr.) Hubie Graham **83** TE  
(R-So.) Drew Carswell 6

(Jr.) Devin Street **15** WR  
(Sr.) Jordan Pratt 7



(R-Fr.) Lafayette Pitts **23** CB  
(R-Sr.) Cullen Christian 24

(R-Jr.) Jason Hendricks **25** FS  
(R-So.) Ray Vinopal 9

(R-So.) T.J. Clemmings **90** DE  
(R-Sr.) Shayne Hiale 45

(R-So.) Eric Williams **49** SLB  
(R-Jr.) Emanuel Rackard 59

(Jr.) Aaron Donald **97** DT  
(Fr.) Darryl Render 91

(R-Jr.) Shane Gordon **44** MLB  
(R-Sr.) Joe Trebitz 53

R-Jr.) Tyrone Ezell **50** NT  
(So.) Khaynin Mosley-Smith 95

(R-So.) Todd Thomas **8** WLB  
(R-Fr.) Nicholas Grigsby 3

(R-Sr.) Jarred Holley **18** SS  
(R-Sr.) Andrew Taglianetti 41

(R-So.) Bryan Murphy **93** DE  
(R-Fr.) Devin Cook 92

(Jr.) K’waun Williams **2** CB  
(R-So.) Cullen Christian 24



(R-Sr.) Kevin Harper **39** PK  
(R-So.) Drake Greer 48

(R-Sr.) Kevin Harper **39** KO  
(R-Fr.) Lafayette Pitts 23

(R-Jr.) Matt Yoklic **92** P  
(R-So.) Drake Greer 48

(R-Sr.) Cameron Saddler **5** KR  
(So.) Kelsey Young 39

(R-Sr.) Cameron Saddler **5** PR  
(So.) Ronald Jones 14

(R-Fr.) David Murphy **67** LS  
(R-Jr.) Kevin Bartheleny 58



Allan Joseph  
Editor-in-Chief



Andrew Owens  
Assistant Managing Editor



Chris Allen  
Sports Editor

Let’s get this out of the way right now: It’s not 2002.

By now, you’ve heard about the 8-0 2002 squad. If you haven’t, look to the right. But these Irish are nothing like the 2002 team for a number of reasons — most importantly, they win with defense.

We’ve seen it time and time again over the years. When a team relies on an eye-popping offense to win games, one off day against a motivated team can derail hopes of a perfect season. Notre Dame’s already done that against Purdue and BYU and triumphed. Even a bad day from the offense will be enough with the suffocating defense on the field.

Yet I don’t think the offense is going to have a bad day. The Panthers are better than they were when they lost to FCS foe Youngstown State, but not that much better. This one’s easy.

Ten years ago, Notre Dame returned to campus with an 8-0 record and top-five ranking after its signature win at Florida State to face an inferior opponent at home with the BCS-hype meter off the charts. Sound familiar?

Don’t even entertain the thought of Pittsburgh handing the Irish their first loss the way Boston College did in 2002. Brian Kelly knows the players need to stay focused on the Panthers, not outside noise or gimmicks like green jerseys. Tyrone Willingham didn’t get that memo.

The Panthers enter November fighting for bowl eligibility at 4-4. Running back Ray Graham is talented, but no match for an Irish run defense that held Oklahoma to 15 rushing yards. If Everett Golson continues his momentum from last Saturday, this game will be out of hand by halftime.

After throttling Temple last weekend, Pittsburgh head coach Paul Chryst gave his players the right to wear last names on their jerseys for a big road game against Notre Dame. On the other end of the spectrum, the Irish have succeeded thus far because they have shunned individual glory and adopted a team mentality. That mentality will need to be on display against a Panthers team that truly hates Notre Dame and would love nothing more than to deliver the death blow to its national championship hopes.

That dreaded first loss may yet come, but it won’t come Saturday. The Irish defense has already stopped quarterbacks and running backs of far higher quality than Tino Sunseri and Ray Graham. The 2012 Irish are too focused to drop a game like this one.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 38, Pittsburgh 6

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 30, Pittsburgh 9

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 27, Pittsburgh 12



# 0 HEAD



## NO. 3 NOTRE DAME



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

**CB** **6** **KeiVarae Russell** (Fr.)

43 Josh Atkinson (So.)

**OLB** **13** **Danny Spond** (Jr.)

30 Ben Councell (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 Beh 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.)

**S** **17** **Zeke Motta** (Sr.)

29 Nicky Baratti (Fr.)

**ILB** **48** **Dan Fox** (Sr.)

44 Carlo Calabrese (Sr.)

**ILB** **5** **Manti Te'o** (Sr.)

59 Jarrett Grace (So.)

**S** **41** **Matthias Farley** (So.)

24 Chris Salvi (Sr.)

**RB** **6** **Theo Riddick** (Sr.)

20 Cierre Wood (Sr.)

**QB** **5** **Everett Golson** (So.)

11 Tommy Rees (Jr.)

**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 came into his own in leading Notre Dame to a 30-13 over Oklahoma. Golson managed the Irish offense with 177 passing yards on 13-for-25 passing and 64 rushing yards while not turning the ball over once. Tied at 13, Golson hit freshman receiver Chris Brown for a 50-yard reception to set the Irish up for a lead they wouldn't give up. Golson was only sacked once and came up with several big throws down the stretch while showing off his athleticism outside of the pocket. Golson has thrown for 1,145 yards and four touchdowns on the season. Junior quarterback Tommy Rees also saw some action while Golson sat out a play due to injury. Rees' only play was a completed 11-yard pass to senior tight end Tyler Eifert for a key first down.

Junior receiver T.J. Jones led Irish receivers with 55 yards and five receptions against the Sooners. Jones has totaled 330 receiving yards and two touchdowns this season. Eifert leads the team in receiving with 341 receiving yards and three touchdowns this season, while averaging 15.5 yards per catch. Eifert added three receptions for 22 yards Saturday.

Pittsburgh comes into Saturday's matchup with an underrated passing defense ranked 41st in the nation in pass efficiency defense and 29th in passing defense, giving up 198.9 yards per game. The Panthers defense has recorded 16 sacks this season, led by junior defensive tackle Aaron Donald's 3.5. In a 35-14 upset win over No. 13 Virginia Tech on Sept. 15, the defense picked off Hokies junior quarterback Logan Thomas three times, with junior safety Jason Hendricks recording two of the three. Hendricks leads the Panthers with four interceptions

### EDGE: EVEN

### IRISH RUSHING

The Irish gained 215 rushing yards against an Oklahoma defense that limited opposing teams to 138.2 rushing yards per game. Notre Dame is averaging 196.5 rushing yards per game, good

enough for 33rd in the nation. Senior running back Theo Riddick led the Irish against Oklahoma with 74 rushing yards on 19 carries, highlighted by a 15-yard touchdown run with 1:36 in the game to seal the victory for the Irish. Senior running back Cierre Wood put the Irish on the board with a 7-3 lead in the first quarter with a 62-yard touchdown run at the 6:24 mark. Wood finished the night wiith 74 rushing yards.

The Panthers defense gives up 141 rushing yards per game, but has made serious strides since opening the season with two consecutive losses. In the last six games, Pittsburgh has only given up 312.3 yards per game compared to the 422.5 yards per game in its first two games.

### EDGE: NOTRE DAME

### IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

Irish coach Brian Kelly made the right calls at the right time against Oklahoma and managed Golson well going down the stretch.

### EDGE: NOTRE DAME

### IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior punter Ben Turk averaged a solid 40.8 yards per punt, including a 51-yarder against Oklahoma. Sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza missed his second of four attempts Saturday, but hit a clutch 46-yarder to put the Irish up 10 with 3:22 left to go in the game. However, the Irish are 113th in the country in yards per punt return with 2.83 from freshman Davonte' Neal.

### EDGE: EVEN

### IRISH SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	<b>vs. Navy</b>	<b>W 50-10</b>
Sept. 8	<b>Purdue</b>	<b>W 20-17</b>
Sept. 15	<b>@ Michigan State</b>	<b>W 20-3</b>
Sept. 22	<b>Michigan</b>	<b>W 13-6</b>
Oct. 6	<b>vs. Miami</b>	<b>W 41-3</b>
Oct. 13	<b>Stanford</b>	<b>W 20-13 (OT)</b>
Oct. 20	<b>BYU</b>	<b>W 17-14</b>
Oct. 27	<b>@ Oklahoma</b>	<b>W 30-13</b>
Nov. 3	<b>Pittsburgh</b>	
Nov. 10	<b>@ Boston College</b>	
Nov. 17	<b>Wake Forest</b>	
Nov. 24	<b>@ USC</b>	



**Andrew Gastelum**  
Associate Sports Editor



**Matthew DeFranks**  
Associate Sports Editor

Don't underestimate this Pittsburgh team. This will be Panthers quarterback Tino Sunseri and running back Ray Graham's third time starting against the Irish and they will be have to be motivated to give the Irish all they can handle.

But this Notre Dame defense proved it can hang with anyone last week in shutting down a powerful Oklahoma attack that was supposed to tear apart the Irish secondary.

Meanwhile, Everett Golson will have his chances to shine Saturday against Pittsburgh, although he will still make his fair share of mistakes. Look for the Irish to win comfortably but not as big as everyone thinks they will.

**FINAL SCORE:** Notre Dame 24, Pittsburgh 13

If one thing happened last weekend in Norman, Okla., it was Everett Golson's confidence growing tremendously. I'm not talking about beating-Michigan-State confidence or throttling-Miami confidence. I'm talking about big-game confidence. He has now proven to almost everyone that he is ready for the ball, the game and the spotlight.

While all that may be true, it really won't matter all too much this Saturday against Pittsburgh. The Panthers have been one of the more inconsistent teams in the nation this year going up against a real national title contender. Manti Te'o and the rest of the Irish defense continue to do their thing while the offense buries Pittsburgh. I just do not think this one is close.

**FINAL SCORE:** Notre Dame 37, Pittsburgh 10

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WAKING THE ECHOES | DAVE CASPER

# Casper moves positions, becomes Hall of Famer



Former Irish tight end Dave Casper, left, played 11 season in the NFL — eight with the Oakland Raiders — and amassed 378 catches for 5,216 yards and 52 touchdowns.

By **MATTHEW DeFRANKS**  
Associate Sports Editor

In 1970, Dave Casper was a freshman at Notre Dame. He was pushed around in practice, simply “meat” for the upperclassmen and trying to survive.

But he did get something that lasted a lifetime his freshman year — his nickname: The Ghost.

“Denny Murphy started called me ‘The Ghost’ when I was on the freshman team and he was the freshman coach,” Casper said in a phone interview with The Observer. “I didn’t really care, I just wanted to get through practice every day without dying.”

Casper did more than survive his freshman season. In his football career, he earned All-American honors, won a national championship, went to five Pro Bowls, won two Super Bowls and has been inducted into both the Pro Football Hall of Fame and the College Football Hall of Fame.

The Chilton, Wisc., native played offensive tackle for his first two seasons with the Irish because of injuries at the position. Casper was so athletic that he started at tackle one week before playing receiver the next.

“I never saw myself playing much,” Casper said. “It just so happened they were short of offensive tackles. So my sophomore year, I was a small offensive tackle that had to play because of a thin offensive line and injuries. My junior year, I was a bigger offensive tackle. My senior year, the tight ends got hurt so they moved me to tight end in the spring and they never moved me back.”

As a young offensive player, Casper said he did not envision his career the way it

unfolded.

“I probably didn’t even think the pros were possible at the time,” Casper said. “I was hoping to be of value my junior and my senior year, maybe I was going to get big enough to contribute. I never really thought much about whether I was going to start or anything. I showed up, did what they told me to do and things worked out.”

Casper was named an All-American in 1973, when the Irish won a national championship under former coach Ara Parseghian. In his collegiate career, he totaled 21 catches for 335 yards and four touchdowns in a primarily running offense.

The 6-foot-3 tight end said Parseghian was an easy coach to play for during his career.

“You went to practice, did what he told you to do and we would win football games,” Casper said. “He had a great understanding of the game and he ran a tight ship. Everything we did meant something. If you couldn’t play for coach Parseghian, you’re probably just trying to cause trouble because it wasn’t very hard to play for him.”

The Oakland Raiders selected Casper in the second round of the 1974 NFL Draft. Casper credits the Raiders coaching for turning him into a Hall of Famer.

“I learned a lot going to the pros working with the Oakland Raiders and Fred Biletnikoff,” Casper said. “I always had a lot of speed and I could always catch so once I got to the pros, I was fortunate enough to be taught some good skill sets and play on a great team.”

The Raiders, who won Super Bowls XI and XV, had a reputation as being one of the toughest teams in the NFL during

the 1970s but Casper shrugged off any notion of it.

“Every team was tough,” Casper said. “College was tough. Everything was tough. Football is a tough game, it always was a tough game.”

Casper was a key figure in a couple iconic NFL moments — ‘The Ghost to the Post’ and ‘The Holy Roller’ — but he said his greatest trait was being in the right place at the right time.

“Most of the time, you’re just plain there,” he said. “On ‘The Ghost to the Post,’ I ran a pattern, they had to throw it to me because they needed to get over 20 yards and I was going deep. I looked over my left shoulder and realized Snake (Ken Stabler) had to throw it way over to the right. I put my head down, changed directions, looked up and the ball was there. Once the ball was there, it’s easy, you just catch it. Most people can catch a pass. Getting to the pass is sometimes difficult.”

“On ‘The Holy Roller,’ I just happened to be the guy at the end that was there when the ball came. I just saw this ball coming at me, tried to pick it up. I didn’t pick it up, I kicked it forward to myself and finally fell on the ball. My greatest skill set was I just happened to be there at the time.”

He finished his NFL career with 378 receptions for 5,216 yards and 52 touchdowns.

Casper, 61, was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2002 and the College Football Hall of Fame this year. The Economics major has been a financial advisor at Northwestern Mutual for 25 years, dealing with retirement planning.

“They remind [me] a lot of Notre Dame; they’re a high-value company,” Casper said.

“They work on long-term integrity. It’s a great fit for me because it reminds me of a lot of the value Notre Dame had, which was taking care of people and doing the right thing.”

Casper related economics to his current job and said it can even be applied to football.

“Anytime you try to decide where to put resources, what to do, how hard to do it, it’s economics,” Casper said. “It even works in football. Should you spend time in the weight room? Should you spend time in practice? Should you spend time resting? Where are you going to get your bang for your buck?”

Casper said Notre Dame prepared him well for life after football.

“Notre Dame teaches you both knowledge and wisdom,” Casper said. “A lot of teaching at Notre Dame isn’t necessarily the professors or the college, it’s the students you’re with. The people you’re around taught you a lot.”

“I wouldn’t say Notre Dame

changes a person into a great person because they went to Notre Dame. I think great people can see the value of Notre Dame and simply choose to go there. Notre Dame has been very fortunate that some great people have decided to go to Notre Dame.”

Casper described his Notre Dame experience as a special one, surrounded by superb people.

“I was in a great place with great people,” Casper said. “How could that not be great being at an institution whose purpose is to preach Jesus Christ and be around people that care about other people? At the same time, I was able to play football and beat Southern Cal.”

Casper is married to his wife Susan and currently lives in Alamo, Calif. He has three children, four step-grandchildren and is expecting a third grandchild.

Contact Matthew DeFranks at [mdefrank@nd.edu](mailto:mdefrank@nd.edu)



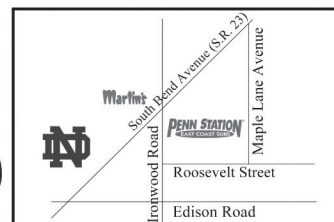
Dave Casper poses with his Pro Football Hall of Fame bust at his induction in 2002. He is also in the College Football Hall of Fame.

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# Chryst stabilizes rocky Pittsburgh program

By **ALLAN JOSEPH**  
Editor-in-Chief

It seems like the head coaching position at Notre Dame has gone through an inordinate amount of upheaval since the last time the Irish were 8-0, with three coaches in less than a decade. But what Pittsburgh has gone through makes the coaching carousel at Notre Dame seem tame.

Dave Wannstedt served as the Panthers' coach from 2005-2010 before resigning. Pittsburgh hired former Notre Dame assistant and then-Miami (Ohio) head coach Mike Haywood in December 2010, but fired him just two weeks later following domestic-violence charges in South Bend. Todd Graham bolted for Arizona State after coaching the Panthers for one season, setting the stage for current coach Paul Chryst to take the reins and attempt to restore stability to a rudderless Pittsburgh program.

Yet in just eight games at the helm, Chryst appears to already have restored a sense of control to the program.

"They have clearly found themselves with a new coach," Kelly said. "It's amazing what they've been able to overcome with three coaches in a very short period of time. It tells you a lot about their

players."

One of the biggest changes Chryst has made was returning the Pittsburgh offense to a pro-style attack from Graham's spread "high-octane" scheme.

"That was the biggest change everyone was looking forward to here," said Sam Werner, who covers the Panthers for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. "The program and the city have a blue-collar mentality, and they want a physical, run-first offense. That matches the culture and the history of the program here really well."

The change in offense has sprung fifth-year senior quarterback Tino Sunseri to the best year of his career. After a 2011 campaign in which he completed 64 percent of his passes for 10 touchdowns and 11 interceptions, Sunseri is completing nearly 70 percent of his throws this year, earning himself 13 touchdowns against only two interceptions in the process.

"He has really matured as a quarterback, [and] I'm really impressed with his play this year," Kelly said. "He takes great care of the football ... He's a guy that I think is playing the best football that he's played his entire career at Pittsburgh."

Werner said Sunseri's comfort

in the offense has to do with a change in the quarterback's decision-making responsibilities.

"I don't want to say he's asked to do less, but he's much more comfortable in his responsibilities on any given play," Werner said. "He's making far fewer mistakes than he did last year."

Sunseri's task against a talented Notre Dame defensive line became much tougher this week when Chryst announced Pittsburgh starting right guard Ryan Schlieper would miss the rest of the season with a foot injury. Sophomore guard Arthur Doakes, will make his first career start and replace Schlieper, who had started 16 games and appeared in 22. Werner said the coaching instability left the Panthers without the depth they were looking for on the offensive line.

"Todd Graham recruited fairly well here. He got some skill players, but I think the biggest concern is depth on the offensive line," Werner said. "Rushel Shell is as talented a freshman running back as you'll find, but the numbers are low on the lines."

"That's not the situation you want to find yourself in."

Contact Allan Joseph at  
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Panthers coach Paul Chryst, shown coaching during a game against Cincinnati, is Pittsburgh's fourth coach since 2010.

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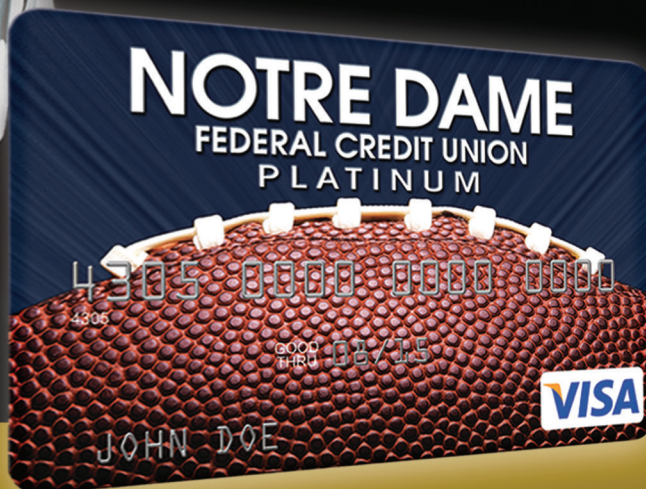
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# Jones evolves into consistent performer

By **ANDREW OWENS**  
Assistant Managing Editor

For two years, junior receiver T.J. Jones stood in the shadows as Michael Floyd rewrote the Irish record book. Amidst heart-break and sporadic play, Jones never emerged as a viable threat behind the NFL-bound talent.

This season, without Floyd and with less pass-catching production from senior tight end Tyler Eifert, Jones has found his niche in the Irish offense while developing as the unit's leader.

"I just think I worked a lot harder this offseason and was a lot more focused day-in and day-out," Jones said. "I try to practice hard every day like it's my last and every game I go out to try and prove something with a chip on my shoulder."

Enter the new T.J. Jones.

In the hostile environment of then-No. 8 Oklahoma, Jones piloted the Irish receiving corps with five critical catches for 55 yards. During No. 3 Notre Dame's 8-0 start, Jones has emerged as a trusted option for the Irish quarterbacks — sophomore Everett Golson in particular.

"I was Everett's host when he came for his visits in high school, so I've known Everett since as early as he's been here," Jones said. "[We] have a good relationship and we talk often. We might hang out every now and then."

"I might pick on him a bit like a little brother, but most of the time we're just kicking it as friends."

Irish coach Brian Kelly said trotting out an experienced offense has eased the burden on Golson.

"I think the big key for [Golson] is he knows going in that he doesn't have to do it himself," Kelly said. "He can rely on others and especially guys like Eifert and T.J. Jones and a veteran offensive line and the backs..."

Jones said being one of the most experienced Irish receivers has been an adjustment, but that he has always taken on a leadership role at Notre Dame.

"It does feel a little different now being a junior," he said. "Technically I'm an upperclassman now, so it does feel different in that aspect, but since I've been here I've been helping people with the playbook because I picked it up fairly easy because I enrolled early [in the 2010 spring semester]."

"I'm used to helping people out and helping them get around."



KEVIN SONG | The Observer

**Junior receiver T.J. Jones evades a Stanford defender during Notre Dame's 20-13 overtime win against the Cardinal on Oct. 13.**

Irish coach Brian Kelly said Jones has improved his play as an all-around receiving threat in the spread offense.

"I think he's really focused on

his craft in terms of route running. He knows he gets more playing time if he's an aggressive blocker, which gives him more opportunity to be on the field and catch the football," he said. "I think he understands that his playing time is predicated on him being a complete player."

"I think the difference between T.J. this year and last year is his focus on being a complete wide receiver in all phases of the game."

Jones said the magnified leadership role has not led to an increase in pressure.

"To me, I'm just trying to produce as much as I can regardless of if it was freshman year or now," he said. "The pressure's there to produce, but I wouldn't say with age comes pressure."

In this, the third year under Kelly's direction, several players have blossomed into their roles.

"They are getting better. They are playing their best football later in their career," Kelly said of the squad's veterans. "Mike Golic [Jr.], Manti Te'o, T.J. Jones and then we have got some young guys that we have to take some of the lumps along the way."

"But I think that's how I look at it more than anything else in terms of the development of the individuals and the whole of the team; I'm pleased with that."

But don't expect Jones to rest on his laurels or become complacent with any individual or team achievement two-thirds of the way through the season.

"Right now, I'd say [I need to get] bigger and faster and stronger," he said. "I learned the playbook from almost every position, if not every position. I can always improve my work ethic to push myself farther and push new limits, but definitely being able to withstand long seasons and become a more physical receiver, I need to do that."

"[The coaches] push me everyday. They expect my best every day ... They're going to push me and not let me get away with little things, and they're going to inspect every detail out of my play."

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# SATURDAY NOVEMBER 3

10AM - 3PM  
JOYCE FIELD HOUSE



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AUTOGRAPH SESSIONS WITH 12 ND OLYMPIANS (11:30AM-12:30PM)

AND TONY RICE & IAN WILLIAMS (12-1)

APPEARANCES BY ND GLEE CLUB (1:45) & CHEERLEADERS

FORD OFFERING CHANCE TO WIN ND BOWL TICKETS



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