

IRISH INSIDER

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2012

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

NOTRE DAME *FIGHTING IRISH* NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

1924	10 - 0 - 0
1929	9 - 0 - 0
1930	10 - 0 - 0
1943	9 - 1 - 0
1946	8 - 0 - 1
1947	9 - 0 - 0
1949	10 - 0 - 0
1966	9 - 0 - 1
1973	11 - 0 - 0
1977	11 - 1 - 0
1988	12 - 0 - 0

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JAN. 7, 2013

NOTRE DAME



ALABAMA

THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Suzanna Pratt and Brandon Keelean

THE PROCESS

Since taking over three years ago, Brian Kelly has emphasized The Process — and used it to earn a shot at a national title

By **ALLAN JOSEPH and ANDREW OWENS**

Editor-in-Chief and
Assistant Managing Editor

Up. Down. Bumpy. Smooth.
Wins. Losses.

Irish coach Brian Kelly has seen it all at Notre Dame since he was hired almost exactly three years ago. But through it all, he's stuck with one thing: The Process.

The Process has taken Notre Dame from the depths of mediocrity to the pinnacle of college

football. And The Process is a very simple plan to do one thing: Win.

"I think it's just being committed to winning. You know, you can't win unless you eradicate all the things that go against it, and that is the process," Kelly said Oct. 2. "It's looking at all of the things that go into winning. ... There are so many factors that you have to concentrate on and the details on a day-to-day basis that goes to winning.

"That's what I think people mean when they talk about the

process. Making sure you have your hand [on] those things that go directly to win it. Most of the time it's eradicating those things that go to not winning more than anything else. So I think that's the process."

When Kelly first met with the media after he was officially announced as Notre Dame's 29th head coach, he never once mentioned The Process — not by that name, at least. Yet from the very beginning of his tenure, he set about putting The Process into place.

Kelly answers a question after his inaugural win as coach, a 23-12 victory over Purdue on Sept. 4, 2010.

Kelly speaks at his introductory press conference Dec. 11, 2010.



Observer File Photo



Observer File Photo

The Hiring

The Process brought Kelly to Notre Dame. When Director of Athletics Jack Swarbrick announced his decision to hire Kelly, he said as much, if not in so many words.

"At every step along the way, it kept taking me back to the same place. It kept taking me back to the conclusion that Brian Kelly was the right person to lead this program," Swarbrick said during Kelly's introductory press conference. "He has won at every level with every kind of team. He is a winner. And he's a winner that at every stop along the way has done by doing it the right way.

"He was the right man at the right time for Notre Dame. And

we are very fortunate to have him lead our program."

Before his move to Notre Dame in 2010, Kelly already had a long track record of building winning programs, from Division II Grand Valley State to Central Michigan to Cincinnati. He described the Notre Dame program, with all of its unique opportunities and challenges, as a new task in many ways — but he said he would stick to his tried-and-true formula: The Process.

"First, this one is totally different than any of the other jobs that I've had. It's unique in every facet," he said on the first day of fall camp in 2010. "But the one consistency here are the players. The players are the same

in terms of what they want to achieve under my leadership, and that is they want to be successful. So we've got the same

"He was the right man at the right time for Notre Dame. And we are very fortunate to have him lead our program."

Jack Swarbrick
director of athletics
Dec. 11, 2010

thing we had at Cincinnati. We've got a bunch of kids that want to win. Now, we're going to

do the same things that we did. This job is different, but we're going to do the same things behind the scenes we did everywhere along the way."

His priority for installing The Process was simple.

"Well, the first thing is you've got to stop losing," Kelly said in August 2010. "All the things that detract you from winning, you know, how do you live your life? ... So I look for all those things that can keep you from winning because I know how to win and I know what the things are that needed to be put in place here.

"To me, that's how you win. It's not just about what the scoreboard says; it's about how you go about doing your job seven days a week, 24 hours a day."

2010: Installation

From the first day of spring practice in 2010, Kelly emphasized The Process would be key to molding the Irish to his vision.

"We don't have five years to put this thing together. We've got to do it right away," he said March 26, 2010. "We give them some very basic parameters to start with. If they stick to those basic parameters, we can move them quickly through the process."

By the time mid-August rolled around, Kelly said he had already noticed a change in his players.

"All of the players have done exactly what we've asked them to do," he said on Media Day. "They knew there had to be a sense of urgency relative to their

THE KELLY ERA AT NOTRE DAME

DEC. 2009

Notre Dame fires Charlie Weis after a 6-6 season and hires Brian Kelly, who led Cincinnati to a 12-0 regular-season finish in 2009.

SEPT. 2010

Unlike his previous two predecessors, Kelly begins his Notre Dame career sluggishly with a 1-3 start and losses to Michigan, Michigan State and a blowout defeat to Stanford.

OCT. 2010

Navy trounces Notre Dame 35-17. The Irish return home and are upset by Tulsa 28-27 to fall to 4-5 on the season.

NOV. – DEC. 2010

After a bye week, Notre Dame upsets No. 14 Utah 28-3, beats Army at Yankee Stadium and tops USC for the first time since 2001. The Irish finish the season on a four-game winning streak with a 33-17 blowout victory over Miami in the Sun Bowl.

FEB. 2011

Kelly reels in a top-10 recruiting haul that includes Everett Golson, Stephon Tuitt, Matthias Farley, Ishaq Williams, George Atkinson and Kyle Brindza.

SEPT. 2011

With BCS hopes heading into the season, the Irish stumble out of the gate with a 23-20 home loss to South Florida and a 35-31 defeat at Michigan after leading 24-7 through three quarters.

OCT. 2011

The Irish win four consecutive games heading into a home matchup with USC, but come out flat as the Trojans prevail 31-17. During the following week, Kelly upsets some players with some comments to the media in what becomes known as 'Twittergate.'

preparation. They were sick and tired of being sick and tired, too. They were 6-6. They felt that walking around campus. We got that buy-in from our guys immediately. Really what it's been about is just a paradigm shift [of] different leadership styles."

Although the groundwork had been laid during the previous offseason, it looked like the same old Irish during the first half of 2010. Mired by a three-game losing streak, capped by a 37-14 loss at home to Stanford, Notre Dame simply wasn't physical enough to compete with elite teams like the Cardinal.

"[The players are] going to be back next week and they're going to strap it back up and they're going to fight and play as hard as they can," said Kelly of continuing to build a physical mentality. "We're going to build this program to where it needs to be.

"There's going to be success down the road for them if they stay with it, and I'm certain that they will."

The Irish then won three consecutive games, but the short-term outlook hardly remained rosy with a blowout loss to Navy and a home defeat to lowly Tulsa to fall to 4-5. Kelly was heavily criticized for trying for a touch-down with freshman quarterback Tommy Rees when a field goal from David Ruffer (18-for-18 in his career at that point) would have given the Irish a win.

Kelly, though, stuck behind his vision and decision-making.

"Keep in mind, you better get used to it, because that's the way we're playing," he said. "To me this is how we play. We're going to play aggressive. We're going to play smart."

Few could have foreseen it at the time, but the Tulsa loss marked the final defeat of the season for the Irish. In need of two wins in the final three games to become bowl-eligible, Notre Dame upset No. 14 Utah at home, beat Army at Yankee Stadium and concluded the regular season with a 20-16 win over USC, the program's first win over the Trojans since 2001. A month later, Kelly became the first Irish coach to win a bowl game in his first season when Notre Dame dominated Miami 33-17 at the Sun Bowl.

With the 4-0 finish, the Irish used the momentum to



Observer File Photo

Kelly instructs quarterback Tommy Rees as quarterback Dayne Crist passes by during Notre Dame's 31-17 loss to USC on Oct. 22, 2011. The loss was the ninth time the Irish fell to the Trojans in the last 10 years.

finish the recruiting season with a bang, earning commitments from three four- or five-star defensive players in the final month of recruiting.

The Process was beginning to take hold.

2011: Sticking with it

All the positive momentum garnered from the end of Kelly's inaugural season seemed to vanish in a thundercloud in the 2011 home opener. Between two weather delays, Notre Dame's BCS hopes received a reality check in the season opener as South Florida topped the Irish 23-20.

Outside of the loss, the biggest story was Kelly's handling of the quarterback situation, a theme that would persist throughout the season. Senior starting quarterback Dayne Crist was pulled at halftime with the Irish losing 16-0, and the job was Rees' the remainder of the season.

"You can't start winning until you stop losing, and the things that we did today out there obviously go to the heart of how you lose football games," said Kelly of his team's error-laden performance. "You lose football games because you turn the ball over. You lose football games because you miss field goals. You lose the football game because you have four personal foul penalties. The list is long."

For three quarters of the following week's contest at

Michigan — the first-ever night game at the Big House — Notre Dame played its best football to date under Kelly. The offense clicked, the defense held Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson in check and it looked like the season-opener was more an aberration than foreshadowing.

However, the Irish suffered a complete meltdown in the fourth quarter, surrendering 28 points in the stanza, the final seven of which transpired with two seconds remaining in the game.

For Kelly and the Irish, it was back to the drawing board and a commitment to trusting The Process.

"We're shaping our team every single day," Kelly said the day after the Michigan loss and 0-2 start. "Again, there are so many

frustration.

"But we're building it the right way. We'll get them there. We're not there yet. I know this journey all too well. I've been on it before. It's frustrating. It's disappointing. It's all those things. We'll break through. There's too many good things happening out there for us not to break through."

The Irish sparked a four-game winning streak the following week with a 31-13 beat down of No. 15 Michigan State. It wasn't a perfect contest, but it was the most convincing sign The Process was working and Kelly's squad was on the rise in the national outlook.

"I know one thing is that they weren't lacking confidence, but sooner or later you gotta get paid," Kelly said. "You gotta be validated in what you do. And so it was a big win for us."

"You can't start winning until you stop losing, and the things that we did today out there obviously go to the heart of how you lose football games."

Brian Kelly
Irish coach
Sept. 3, 2011

details to that. All you guys care about — and I understand that, and our fans — is that it equals wins, and we're not doing that for them. I understand the

Heading into the USC game with a four-game winning streak, the Trojans hampered by NCAA sanctions and the 2010 win at the Los Angeles Coliseum,

it appeared the rivalry might be shifting in Notre Dame's favor. USC emphatically put those thoughts to rest with a 31-17 victory in Notre Dame's first home night game since 1990.

The following Thursday, Kelly created a controversy regarding players he recruited and ones Weis had recruited.

"You can see the players that I recruited here. You know who they are," Kelly said. "We've had one class of recruiting, kids that I've had my hand on. The other guys here are coming along, but it's a process. It can't happen overnight. They're getting there. They're making good progress."

A Twitter firestorm erupted as some players rushed to social media to let out their frustration. (Irish linebacker Manti Te'o tweeted, "Playin for my bros and that's it!!!!")

After Kelly apologized to the team, the Irish recorded a four-game winning streak for the second time in 2011. However, the Irish were no match physically for an elite Stanford squad in the regular-season finale; in the Champs Sports Bowl, Notre Dame blew a 14-0 second-half deficit and lost 18-14 to Florida State to finish 8-5 for the second consecutive season.

The Process was tested, and so was the team's resolve. A quarterback battle ensued. A mediocre recruiting class enrolled. Two players transferred, including defensive end Aaron Lynch, who dazzled during his freshman season with five and a half sacks.

"The challenges are great here," Kelly said. "If your head and heart is not in it, you just can't be successful. Aaron and I talked about it and mutually agreed that the best decision for him is to leave the football team."

"I've been in it 25 years — people are going to quit all the time. It happens. It's part of the process. ... Why is it newsworthy? Because [Lynch] is a really good player."

While Lynch and cornerback Tee Shepard left and a class of new players signed, the most important recruiting pitch Kelly had to make was to Te'o and tight end Tyler Eifert to return for their senior seasons.

Trusting The Process, both did so.

see KELLY **PAGE 4**

DEC. 2011

Notre Dame surrenders a 14-0 lead to Florida State in the Champs Sports Bowl and loses 18-14, concluding Kelly's second consecutive 8-5 season.

JAN. 2012

Irish linebacker Manti Te'o and tight end Tyler Eifert forgo the NFL Draft to return for their senior seasons. Kelly announces a four-way quarterback battle, a derby Golson eventually won. Assistants Ed Warriner, Tim Hinton and Charley Molnar depart and Aaron Lynch and Tee Shepard leave the University.

SEPT. 2012

The Irish start 4-0 for the first time since 2002, highlighted by a victory at top-10 Michigan State and their first victory over Michigan since 2008.

OCT. 2012

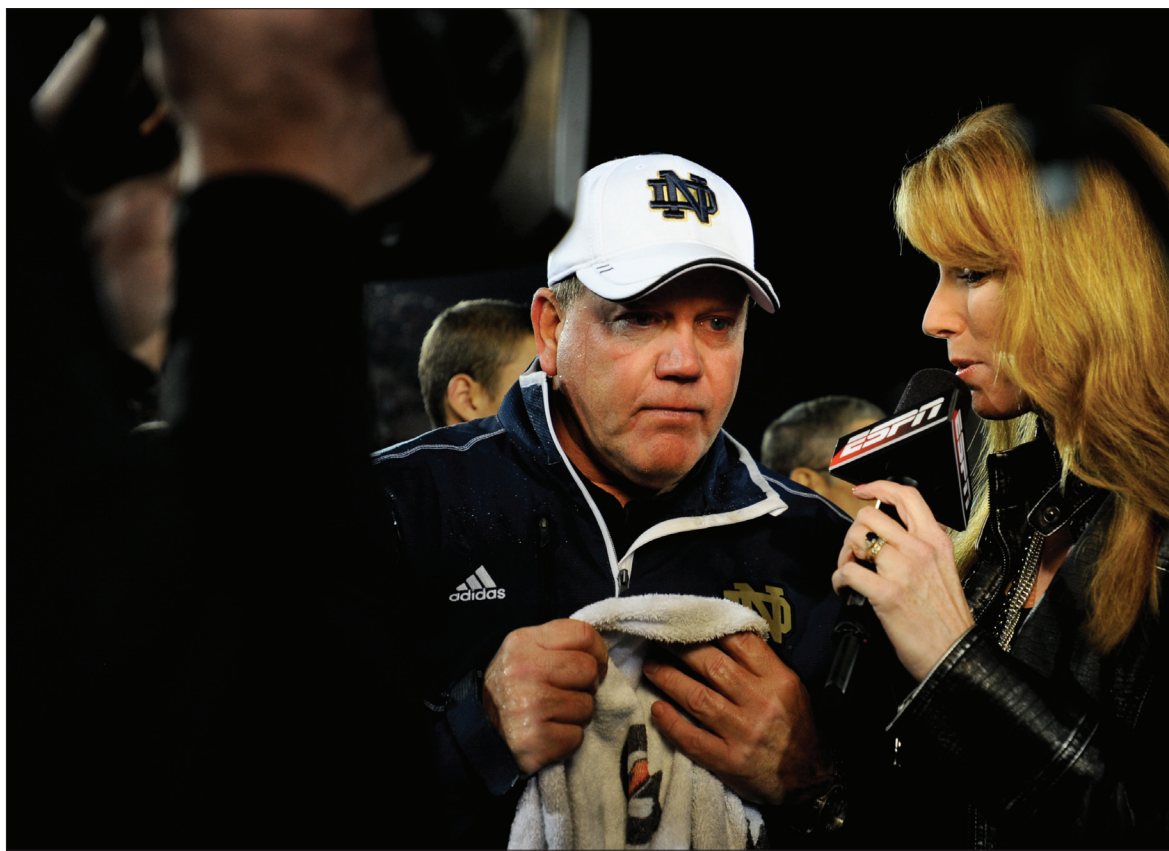
Notre Dame holds Stanford at the goal line to secure a 20-13 overtime victory as ESPN's "College GameDay" visits campus for the first time since 2005. Two weeks later, the Irish hand Bob Stoops and No. 8 Oklahoma a 30-13 loss as Notre Dame improves to 8-0.

NOV. 2012

The Irish clinch a perfect home record for the first time since 1998 and rise to No. 1 in the polls for the first time since 1993. A week later, the Irish win at the Los Angeles Coliseum for the second straight time and finish a 12-0 regular season with a 22-13 win at USC.

JAN. 2012

Notre Dame and Alabama face off with a national championship on the line. A victory would give the Irish their first championship since 1988.



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Kelly speaks with ESPN reporter Heather Cox after Notre Dame's 22-13 victory over USC on Nov. 24. The victory completed a 12-0 season for the Irish, the first undefeated regular season since 1988.

Kelly

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

2012: Proof

The Process guided Kelly as he prepared for a pivotal third year with a schedule harder than any other in the nation.

"Year one, it's the typical learn the names of the players, begin to implement your schemes; year two, try to develop that depth in the units; and I think for me in year three it's a comfortable feeling that I know my football team very well going into year three," he said at the beginning of spring practice.

Kelly said The Process was more about preparing his team for the grueling slate mentally and physically.

"One part of the challenge to our football team is to get all of our players to play at a championship level on a consistent basis," he said Sept. 11. "I think you build toughness in so many ways before you get to the season, and then when you get to the season you look to see it come together. ... I think we are developing it, and I think it's something that we continue to talk about every single day."

After reeling off four wins to start the 2012 campaign, Kelly said The Process was finally starting to show results.

"Our guys have been committed to the process. It's painstakingly slow, sometimes it's quicker. But they've been committed to the process," he said. "It's taking that and translating it to Saturdays. And this group is translating it to Saturdays, at least for the first four weeks."

"But they've done a nice job of preparing and doing the things we've asked them to do. We think we're close to being consistent in that approach."

Part of the Process-based approach involved keeping the Irish focused on the game ahead — with the grind of week-in, week-out competition, a single glance at the final goal could mean the season would be derailed. When his squad improved to 5-0 and a

No. 7 national ranking, Kelly had to make it clear to his players that attention to detail mattered more than ever, especially with a titanic home date with Stanford looming days ahead.

"We don't talk from that level from 30,000 feet because it doesn't do us any good. All we can focus on is what we can control on a day-to-day basis," he said before the matchup with the Cardinal. "Among us, it's about today and what we do today."

Yet with ESPN's "College GameDay" in South Bend for the first time in seven years and hype building around Notre Dame's rise in the polls, The Process was beginning to deliver results that would only draw more attention to the big picture.

"I've worked this plan for a number of years. I've had great success with it," Kelly said. "If [the players] choose to continue to follow it they're going to continue to have success. It's the trust element of staying focused on what we can handle and what we need to handle and we will be fine."

If the players didn't embrace it, The Process would consist only of words from the head coach, and they would not translate to the field.

"I've always felt that teams in November have a distinct advantage if they're enjoying the process, if they really come over here and feel good about practice," Kelly said before facing Oklahoma. "I think you really have to enjoy the process and enjoy winning in particular."

"I've had teams that have really enjoyed the process. And this group does."

The Process, which had been in place since Kelly's arrival, led the then-No. 5 Irish to a dominating 30-13 victory over the then-No. 8 Sooners, a win a long time in the making.

"I think it's a process of not just this year," Kelly said after the win. "These wins happen over periods of time, not just one-year cycles. This has been a group that has had to take some lumps and learn along the way. It's got great leadership. I think it's a cumulative

effect that this football team is now positioning itself to win these kinds of games because of what they've gone through the last two years."

As his team continued to win games and rise up the rankings, with a shot at the national crown becoming ever more tangible, Kelly said he could feel The Process had firmly taken root in his program.

"It's a process, that when you're so involved in it that you don't know there is a particular day, but you do know that things are being done the way you want them on a day-to-day basis. You sense and feel it," he said Nov. 13. "I don't know that there was one particular day. I think the last couple years our players really understood preparation. They understood how to prepare. They were learning how to play the game."

"I think we've learned how to play the game on Saturdays a lot

better over the last year and a half."

And when his team finally lit up the sign atop Grace Hall, needing only to vanquish rival USC to earn a trip to the BCS National Championship Game, Kelly emphasized The Process once more.

"We're operating on, 'You better have a good day today in practice because you just watched film, and we saw the things you did wrong yesterday,' he said Nov. 20 before the Irish traveled to Los Angeles. "We keep them away from the big picture, because they don't see it that way. They don't come to work that way on a day-to-day basis."

Finally, in the aftermath of a raucous celebration in the Los Angeles Coliseum, Notre Dame's

"These wins happen over periods of time, not just one-year cycles."

Brian Kelly
Irish coach
Oct. 27, 2012

ticket to Miami punched, Kelly said The Process had been vindicated.

"Here's what I know: We set out this season to build our program and get it back into the national discussion when you're talking about championship programs, and we're in that discussion," he said.

The Process brought the Irish back to the top.

2013 and beyond

Even with tangible proof of the validity of The Process, don't expect Kelly to abandon the message, regardless of the result of the BCS National Championship Game.

"When you go in that locker room and you're around the guys I'm around, you're not surprised because what they've done, the commitment they've made, they've done everything I've asked them to do," said Kelly after the season-concluding win at USC. "Everything. So it doesn't surprise me anymore because of the guys that we're around."

Twenty-two high school prospects have committed to Notre Dame so far in the 2013 recruiting cycle, good enough for a No. 2 ranking nationally on Rivals.com.

Kelly will continue to stress defense on the recruiting trail and in the locker room, and offensively the next step for the Irish is to build around sophomore quarterback Everett Golson.

Former Irish coach Ara Parseghian, who led the program to national championships in 1966 and 1973, said he has witnessed The Process while observing the program.

"He's done a good job recruiting, he's well organized," Parseghian said. "He can motivate. I've gone out to practice a few times and talked to him and what he's been able to do — and this is important for coaches — is place the personnel where they best function for the team."

"He would just spend so many hours between the end of one game and the beginning of the next. Time is at a premium, so any wasted period wasted on something not important is thrown right out the window. I think he does a great job of that."

Kelly's next challenge is to sustain the program's success on a consistent basis. Past coaches have noted the stress of working long-term at Notre Dame, even when they are successful. If Kelly can stick to The Process, there's no telling how long he might last.

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SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Kelly looks on during Notre Dame's 22-13 victory over USC on Nov. 24. Following their perfect regular season, the No. 1 Irish will face No. 2 Alabama in the BCS National Championship Game.

Golson leads Irish to title game in first season



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson escapes pressure in the pocket and looks for an open receiver in No. 1 Notre Dame's 22-13 win over USC at the Los Angeles Coliseum on Nov. 24. In his last four games, Golson has thrown for seven touchdowns with one interception while averaging 247.5 passing yards per game.

By **ANDREW GASTELUM**
Associate Sports Editor

Everett Golson heard about the blinding spotlight of being the starting quarterback at Notre Dame. He knew about its legendary aura, its golden tradition and the blaring pressure to wake up the echoes.

But to the sophomore quarterback, pressure is simply an eight-letter word.

"I've always been a guy that never really feels pressure," Golson said. "I think pressure is all about personal perception. I've never really been the guy to feel pressure. I just want to be the best teammate I can be for the rest of these guys, for the rest of the seniors. I just want to try to learn as quick as I can to help the coaches and the players around me. I want to achieve

what we want to achieve this year."

Golson came out of Myrtle Beach High School as a three-star recruit with an average 6-foot, 170-pound build, yet his first game action wearing a gold helmet was as Notre Dame's starting quarterback in Ireland. Fast forward three months, and the first-year signal-caller has led an improbable march to the BCS National

Championship Game all while leading the No. 1 Irish to its first undefeated regular season since 1988.

"I would like to say that I [thought I could lead Notre Dame to the national championship] but really I couldn't have," Golson said while holding an award for Offensive Newcomer of the Year. "With me being so young, you don't really think about that. You think about the small things because you definitely don't want to mess up the little details.

"One thing that I can say that I really saw in this team is that unity. Like Manti [Te'o] talked about numerous times, our teammates can hold it together as a family. Once you have that in your team, anything can happen."

And at the end of Golson's meteoric rise to prominence awaits Alabama's vaunted defense — No. 1 in total defense — and Crimson Tide coach Nick Saban, winner of two of the last three national titles.

"[The key is] just to stay level-headed," Golson said. "Just knowing that there will be mistakes out there and I understand that. But it's about what happens at the end of the night. Just keep working and it and keep pushing it and be able to look up at the scoreboard at the end and see what happens."

Golson's 11 wins — he missed Notre Dame's 17-14 win over BYU on Oct. 22 with a concussion — 2,135 passing yards, 305 rushing yards and 16 touchdowns haven't come without taking every possibly opportunity to learn.

"There were a couple of late-night discussions where he'd ask me what I thought he needed to improve on and not hold anything back," junior quarterback Tommy Rees said. "I

told him the truth, although sometimes it wasn't what he wanted to hear."

For Golson, the steep learning curve of the Kelly offense has been more of a roller coaster ride. He endured three benchings, one on the final drive in his first home game as Notre Dame squeaked by Purdue with a 20-17 win on Sept. 8, another coming after two poorly thrown interceptions in a 13-6 win over then-No. 18 Michigan on Sept. 22 and the most recent coming in 29-26 triple-overtime win over Pittsburgh on Nov. 3.

"He's come very, very, very far," senior running back Theo Riddick said. "Who would've ever thought? And he did it so quickly. He grew on the scene and that was the most significant thing. A lot of guys grow in the back, in the offseason or in the preseason. He did it during the regular season when all of the lights were on."

Golson has fought through the challenges of growing into his hype to become a versatile dual-threat quarterback with the chance to lead Notre Dame to its 12th national title and first in 25 years.

"I think I have been through a lot and overcome a lot of adversity," he said. "I think it comes back to me always playing with the bigger guys. There's times growing up where I never got picked so I decided to keep working and that kept me motivated. That's what shows now, what was instilled in me in my childhood."

But on Jan. 7 in Miami, he will be Irish coach Brian Kelly's first pick with an opportunity to complete Notre Dame's Cinderella season with a glass football.

Contact Andrew Gastelum at agastell1@nd.edu

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GO IRISH! Good Luck in Miami!

COMMENTARY

Irish 60 minutes away from best season ever



Chris Allen
Sports Editor

Sixty minutes.

The 2012 season has been an epic four-month journey for Notre Dame, from Ireland to California and everywhere in between. But those sixty minutes are all that remain.

Sixty minutes. An hour of football between the Irish and a most improbable championship.

At stake is a simple proposition. It has been 125 years since the first season of Notre Dame football in 1887. In that time, the Irish have amassed the greatest history of any program in college football. But if Brian Kelly and his team defeat Alabama and hoist the crystal ball at midfield of Sun Life Stadium in January, they will have capped off what will be regarded as the greatest season in Notre Dame history. The history books that tell tales of The Gipper, the Four Horsemen and the Era of Ara will be rewritten around the miracle run of Manti Te'o and his brothers. In a sparkling history, 2012 will be the crown jewel.

You would be right to point out that I have not been alive for a Notre Dame national championship — those golden years were before my time. But this group of Irish players has a special claim at glory, and with a crystal ball in tow they will have achieved more as a unit than any previous iteration to wear the blue and gold.

A win over Alabama would bring an undefeated, national champion Notre Dame team to an unprecedented 13-0 record. First, the obvious: no Notre Dame team has ever won 13 games in a season before, not to mention doing so without losing a game. It is a remarkable number. 13 times Notre Dame will have lined up against an FBS opponent, and 13 times it will have fended the opponent off. In 1988, Lou Holtz's Irish went 12-0 to set the record for wins in one season already tied by this year's group. Before that, it was customary for national champion Irish teams to finish 10-0, 9-0 or even 9-1.

But it's so much more than numbers. It's the collective revival of passions that occurred this fall, the rumbling of decades-old fervor and the waking of seemingly dormant echoes. At no point in history has Notre Dame been

declared dead and irrelevant in college football more than in the past decade. It has been 24 long autumns since Notre Dame touched the crystal ball and stood at the mountain-top of college football — the longest drought previously was 17 years between 1949 and 1966. While Notre Dame stood still and cycled through one disappointing coach after another, the college football world was seemingly passing it by. The SEC rose as a dominant conference and new polished offenses with speed and athleticism made the Irish look archaic by comparison. Even in 2010 and 2011, with Kelly at the helm, the Irish were out of gear and lost to Tulsa and South Florida on their own hallowed Stadium ground.

Then 2012 happened.

Every cliché, every slogan used to describe the decline of Notre Dame is now out the window — with a first-year quarterback, an inexperienced secondary and an unranked spot in the preseason Associated Press poll, Notre Dame ripped off a season that nobody who works outside the walls of the Guglielmino Athletics Center could have seen coming. The season has been a cathartic release for a fan base that had grown tired of pointing to a past that was fading further into memory by the year. The Domer faithful have new heroes now. A whole generation of Irish fans are seeing a nationally relevant Notre Dame for the first time. If it is Notre Dame that leaves the field in Miami the victors, they will tell stories of 2012 for decades, and they will do so pointing to a bronze statue of Kelly outside the house that Rockne built.

The debate of which Notre Dame team is best on the field is another one entirely — and a fun one at that. But if Te'o and Kelly raise the Coaches' Trophy under a sea of falling confetti, the debate of which Notre Dame team will have accomplished the most will yield an easy answer: It will be the current group.

Before they can stand as immortals in Notre Dame lore, though, they must conquer one final hurdle, equally simple and steep.

Sixty minutes.

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



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Junior running back Tyler Plantz, right, celebrates Notre Dame's 22-13 win over USC on Nov. 24. The win sealed Notre Dame's place in the BCS National Championship Game on Jan. 7 against No. 2 Alabama.

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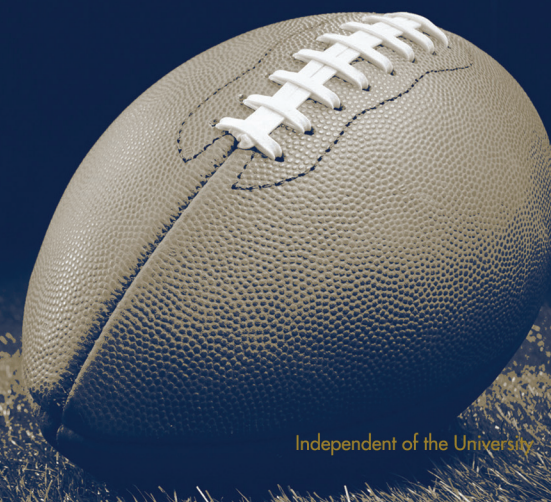
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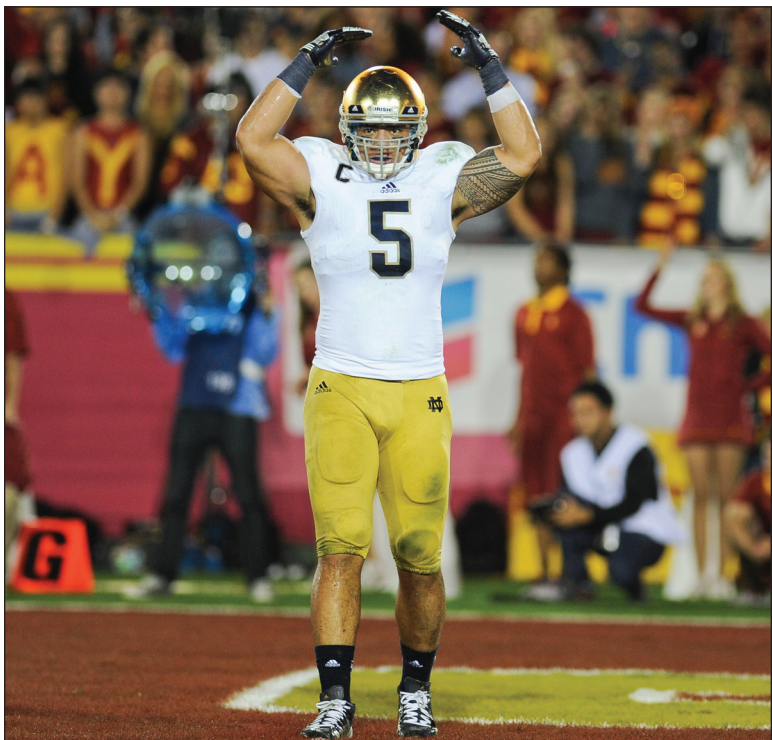
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Te'o, Eifert bring home national awards



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

Senior linebacker Manti Te'o, pictured during Notre Dame's 22-13 win over USC on Nov. 24, won a record seven national awards.

By **MATTHEW DeFRANKS**
Associate Sports Editor

Coming into the season, Irish senior linebacker Manti Te'o was an All-American selection — but never in anyone's wildest dreams was he a Heisman Trophy contender. But still, Te'o sat in New York on Saturday as a finalist for the most famous trophy in college football.

Te'o made history by finishing second to Texas A&M redshirt freshman quarterback Johnny Manziel and securing the most points ever by an exclusively defensive player. The senior from Laie, Hawaii, tallied 1,706 points and 321 first-place votes.

"It's motivation," Te'o said Saturday night. "I always wanted to be the best. I just use that motivation too. Just to be the best I can be. Obviously, I have a lot of work to do and I'm just

excited to get back and get things cracking."

Te'o said he was happy the awards circuit was done with so he could prepare for No. 2 Alabama in the BCS National Championship Game in Miami on Jan. 7.

"I'm relieved it's over. I'm excited that I get the chance to prepare for Bama," Te'o said. "Heisman Trophy or national championship, I'll take a national championship 100 times out of 100."

His runner-up finish for the Heisman was just part of a hectic week of traveling to awards shows around the country. Te'o traveled to five different cities and three different time zones to rack up seven national awards, more than anyone in college football history in one season.

Before the Heisman ceremony, Te'o had already won

the Butkus Award, Nagurski Award (best defensive player), Lombardi Award (best lineman or linebacker), Walter Camp Player of the Year, Bednarik Award (most outstanding defensive player) and Maxwell Award (most outstanding player).

In Newport Beach, Calif., on Sunday night — a day after losing the Heisman Trophy in New York — Te'o won the Lott Trophy, awarded to college football's defensive IMPACT Player of the Year.

"To be a player and do the stuff that he wants to do on a team that's 12-0 playing in the national championship that hasn't been there in years is absolutely breathtaking," sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt said Friday night after Notre Dame's annual awards show. "He is the leader on a team going to the national championship."

Te'o accumulated 103 tackles, 5.5 tackles for loss, 1.5 sacks, four quarterback hurries, two fumble recoveries and seven interceptions. His nine caused turnovers are tied for tops in the country.

Eifert wins Mackey

Senior tight end Tyler Eifert took home the Mackey Award, annually presented to the top tight end in the nation.

Eifert has 44 catches for 624 yards and four touchdowns this season. He beat out finalists Zach Ertz of Stanford and Austin Seferian-Jenkins of Washington.

The senior from Fort Wayne, Ind., is Notre Dame's all-time leading receiver among tight ends and is the first Irish player to win the Mackey Award.

Coaches earn honors

Both Irish coach Brian Kelly and defensive coordinator Bob Diaco also won prestigious awards.

Kelly won the Home Depot Coach of the Year award, becoming the first coach in the award's history to win twice. He also won in 2009 as head coach of Cincinnati. Kelly has led the Irish to its first undefeated regular season in 24 years.

Diaco, meanwhile, won the Broyles Award as the best assistant coach in the country. Diaco built the nation's top scoring defense, allowing 10.3 points per game. The Irish defense ranks in the top 20 nationally in 16 different statistical categories. He is the first Notre Dame coach to win the award.

AP All-Americans

The Irish placed four players on the Associated Press All-American teams announced Tuesday.

Te'o earned first-team honors while Eifert and Tuitt were named to the second-team. Graduate student center Braxton Cave garnered third-team honors.

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RECRUITING

Undefeated season draws elite recruits

By **CHRIS ALLEN**
Sports Editor

2012 has been a year of No. 1s for Notre Dame — for the first time in college football, a single program paired a No. 1 BCS ranking with a No. 1 Graduation Success Rate. That success has trickled down to the recruiting effort of the Irish coaches, who have assembled a class ranked in the top-three by most recruiting services. The unique position of offering the top graduation rate in the country along with the top football team in the BCS rankings gives Notre Dame its strongest position from which to recruit in recent memory. Irish recruiting expert Mike Frank said Notre Dame's recruiting momentum is unmatched at the moment.

"Nobody has all the advantages that Notre Dame has in recruiting when Notre Dame is good in football," said Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliated Irish Sports Daily. "Stanford is a fantastic school and so is Northwestern, but they just can't compete with Notre Dame when it comes to exposure and a lot of other things. While those schools offer great opportunities, it's just not quite the full package that Notre Dame offers. Stanford's been good in football so they are competing with Notre Dame, but they'll never offer the game experience Notre Dame does."

"They're playing in the Pac-12 Championship and their stadium is half full. That's just ridiculous. When Notre Dame is winning football games, they are very, very difficult to beat in recruiting"

Notre Dame's recruiting staff has turned that momentum into a standout, 22-commitment class of players that ranks among the nation's elite. As the 2012 Irish continued to win games, the 2013 class of recruits continued to grow larger and more talented by the week. 2013 cornerback commitment Devin Butler, a native of Washington, D.C., said Notre Dame's undefeated run attracted talented recruits.

"There is a new kind of buzz with the team and the fans. I feel like the team has handled the success well, and college football is better when we are playing great like we are," Butler said. "There is a real good buzz. A lot of people are attracted to success and once someone gets on campus and sees all that Notre Dame has to offer it's hard not to seize that opportunity."

The dream season of Notre Dame senior linebacker Manti Te'o, who finished second in voting for the Heisman Trophy, helped Notre Dame attract a star-studded class of linebackers to fill the shoes he will vacate this spring as he heads to the NFL. Five-star linebacker Jaylon Smith and high four-star

linebacker Alex Anzalone are committed to join the linebacking corps in 2013 and fill the void left by Te'o. Anzalone said he relishes the opportunity to join Smith and fellow linebacking commits Doug Randolph and Michael Deeb in replacing Te'o.

"[Manti's year] had a significant impact on me committing to Notre Dame. He is a great guy that I've developed a relationship with," Anzalone said. "I love [the other linebackers]. We all mesh together so well and are excited to get to Notre Dame and continue the linebacker tradition."

Frank said the way Te'o's strong integrity and character were publicized in the media will help Notre Dame recruit by sending strong messages to parents of prospective recruits.

"Manti's such a good kid. Parents of these prospects see that," Frank said. "They see Notre Dame is developing more than good football players; they're developing good people and good leaders. They want their sons to be around people like that."

The special class of commitments, a group that will likely end up as one of the best recruiting classes in recent memory for Notre Dame, has even earned a nickname — The "Irish Mob." The nickname started as a joke between Butler, quarterback commit Malik Zaire and wide receiver commit James Onwualu, and evolved into a social media phenomenon uniting all 2013 Irish commits.

"It was way back when it was only 11 commits," Butler said. "I was just talking to Malik Zaire and James Onwualu about how we 'mob,' which is slang for playing well, and they both said, 'We are the Irish Mob,' and we ran with it. It helps to keep us close because it's just a way to unite us and keep us all together without being together."

Frank said the cohesiveness of the class owes a lot to the leadership of Butler, Onwualu and tight end commit Mike Heurman, all of whom committed before the 2012 season began.

"What you had was a couple of guys who committed who were just natural-born leaders. Guys like Onwualu and Heurman and Devin Butler, some of those types of guys are leaders. When they committed, they took it upon themselves to go out and recruit as many guys as they could to join them. That's had a big, big impact," Frank said. "A ton of these kids have worked hard to make them feel welcome. You had a kid in Onwualu who was at nearly every game despite being from Minnesota, and he took it upon himself to make the other recruits feel at home on their visits."

The "Mob" gained its newest member Sunday as Florida



BEN HASTY | Reading Eagle

Irish commitment Alex Anzalone carries the ball for Wyomissing Area High School this season. Anzalone, a linebacker recruit, is set to enroll early in the spring for Notre Dame.

running back Greg Bryant, the No. 27-ranked player in the country according to ESPN, committed to Notre Dame. Frank said Bryant will immediately compete to start in the backfield.

"The biggest thing you can say about Bryant is in Florida he was going up against the best of the best competition in the country, and absolutely dominated," Frank said. "He has for a couple of years. When you have that kind of strength, size and

speed along with God-given ability, you look at that as somebody who can play right away. I'd be very surprised if, come the end of fall camp, his name is not up there near the top competing for the starting job."

While the 2012 season has captivated Irish fans everywhere, the work of the Irish recruiting staff has quietly laid the foundation to keep Notre Dame among the nation's elite.

"They have a great shot to get the No. 1 class this year. They're

going to have to ink a few more players, definitely," Frank said. "They're set to cash in on this great season, they've put themselves in a great spot."

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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Congratulations **Manti Te'o** on your Sportsmanship Award, Butkis Award, Nagurski Award, Lombardi Award, and on being a Heisman Trophy finalist!

Congratulations to Coach **Brian Kelly** on being named the Home Depot Coach of the Year! And Congrats to **Tyler Eifert** for winning the John Mackey award for Best Tight End!



AP



AP

ALABAMA PASSING

Junior signal-caller A.J. McCarron has been stellar in his second season as a starter after leading Alabama to a title in his first year at the helm. McCarron is the nation’s most efficient passer with a passer efficiency rating of 173. He has enjoyed the protection of the country’s best offensive line, including Outland Trophy finalist Barrett Jones at center and top tackles D.J. Fluker and Cyrus Kouandjio. At wide receiver, freshman All-American Amari Cooper has torched defenses on passes down the field and in the flat. Cooper leads Alabama with 895 yards receiving and nine touchdowns through the air. Beyond Cooper, no Crimson Tide player has emerged as an elite receiving threat. Running backs Eddie Lacy and T.J. Yeldon are threats to catch the ball out of the backfield and make people miss on screen plays. Without an elite passcatching option behind Cooper, the Irish secondary will key in and try to force turnovers. Though the young group in the Notre Dame secondary was scrutinized heading into the season, they performed well against more prolific passing games than the one Alabama will bring to Sun Life Stadium.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

ALABAMA RUSHING

The recent Alabama national championships have been built around a strong running game. 2009 Heisman winner Mark Ingram and All-American back Trent Richardson powered wins in the 2010 and 2012 incarnations of the BCS National Championship Game. This year’s version of the Crimson Tide was expected to take a step back in the rushing department after Richardson departed to the NFL. Junior Eddie Lacy has taken the mantle as Alabama’s rushing threat and established a physical presence in the Crimson Tide backfield. Lacy totaled 1182 yards and 16 touchdowns on the ground and rose to the occasion against Georgia in the SEC Championship Game. Lacy gashed the physical Bulldog defense for 181 yards behind a physical offensive line. Lacy’s ascension has been boosted by the impressive freshman-year performance of T.J. Yeldon in the backfield. Yeldon added 1,000 yards of his own on 30 fewer carries throughout the season and scored Alabama’s

game-winning touchdown against LSU on the road. Notre Dame brings its own stout defense in the run game to clash with Lacy, Yeldon and the Crimson Tide offensive line. Defensive end Stephon Tuitt, nose guard Louis Nix and linebacker Manti Te’o form the foundation of the nation’s best scoring defense. Notre Dame has been particularly strong in run defense, holding Oklahoma to an impossibly-low 15 rushing yards and limiting high-profile Big Ten rushers in Michigan’s Denard Robinson and Michigan State’s Le’Veon Bell.

EDGE: EVEN

ALABAMA OFFENSIVE COACHING

Alabama offensive coordinator Doug Nussmeier has adjusted nicely to play-calling in his first season at the position. He has been interviewed for head coaching positions as a result of his success. But he faces a true chess match with the man recently named the best assistant coach in the country — Bob Diaco. Diaco has shown the ability to scheme against great offenses all season, bottling up USC, Michigan and Oklahoma.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

ALABAMA SPECIAL TEAMS

Alabama employs a unique, two-kicker system to kick field goals. Short field goal kicker Jeremy Shelley is nearly automatic and has not missed on the season. Long field goal kicker Cade Foster is only 4-of-9 on the season but has a big leg. Christion Jones has a 99-yard kickoff return for a touchdown and averages 30 yards per kickoff return.

EDGE: ALABAMA

ALABAMA SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	vs. Michigan	W 41-14
Sept. 8	Western Kentucky	W 35-0
Sept. 15	@ Arkansas	W 52-0
Sept. 22	Florida Atlantic	W 40-7
Sept. 29	Mississippi	W 33-14
Oct. 13	@ Missouri	W 42-10
Oct. 20	@ Tennessee	W 44-13
Oct. 27	Mississippi State	W 38-7
Nov. 3	@ LSU	W 21-17
Nov. 10	Texas A&M	L 29-24
Nov. 17	Western Carolina	W 49-0
Nov. 24	Auburn	W 49-0
Dec. 1	vs. Georgia	W 32-28
Jan. 7	vs. Notre Dame	

HEAD T

NO. 2 ALABAMA



(Jr.) Kevin Norwood ⁸³	WR	(So.) Christion Jones ²²	WR
(So.) Christion Jones ²²	WR	(Fr.) Cyrus Jones ⁸	WR
(So.) Cyrus Kouandjio ⁷¹	LT	(Jr.) Kellen Williams ⁶³	LT
(Jr.) Eddie Lacy ⁴²	RB	(Fr.) T.J. Yeldon ⁴	RB
(Jr.) A.J. McCarron ¹⁰	QB	(So.) Blake Sims ⁶	QB
(Sr.) Chance Warmack ⁶⁵	LG	(So.) Chad Lindsay ⁷⁸	LG
(Sr.) Barrett Jones ⁷⁵	C	(R-Fr.) Ryan Kelly ⁷⁰	C
(Jr.) Anthony Steen ⁶¹	RG	(So.) A’rie Kouandjio ⁷⁷	RG
(Jr.) D.J. Fluker ⁷⁶	RT	(So.) Austin Shepherd ⁷⁹	RT
(Sr.) Michael Williams ⁸⁹	TE	(So.) Brian Vogler ⁸⁴	TE
(Fr.) Amari Cooper ⁹	WR	(R-Fr.) Marvin Shinn ⁸⁰	WR



(Sr.) Robert Lester ³⁷	S	(So.) Vinnie Sunseri ³	S
(Sr.) Nico Johnson ³⁵	ILB	(Jr.) C.J. Mosley ³²	ILB
(So.) Trey DePriest ³³	ILB	(Sr.) Nico Johnson ³⁵	ILB
(So.) HaHa Clinton-Dix ⁶	S	(Jr.) Nick Perry ²⁷	S
(Jr.) Deion Belue ¹³	CB	(Fr.) Geno Smith ²⁴	CB
(So.) Xzavier Dickson ⁴⁷	OLB	(Fr.) Denzel Devall ³⁰	OLB
(Jr.) Ed Stinson ⁴⁹	DE	(So.) Jeffery Pagan ⁸	DE
(Sr.) Jesse Williams ⁵⁴	NG	(So.) Brandon Ivory ⁶²	NG
(Sr.) Damion Square ⁹²	DE	(Sr.) Quinton Dial ⁹⁰	DE
(So.) Adrian Hubbard ⁴²	OLB	(Jr.) Jonathan Atchison ¹⁹	OLB
(Jr.) Dee Milliner ²⁸	CB	(Jr.) John Fulton ¹⁰	CB



(Sr.) Jeremy Shelley ⁵	PK	(Jr.) Cade Foster ⁴³	KO
(Jr.) Cody Mandell ²⁹	P	(Sr.) Jeremy Shelley ⁵	P
(So.) Christion Jones ²²	PR	(Fr.) Cyrus Jones ⁸	KR
(Sr.) Carson Tinker ⁵¹	LS	(Sr.) Kelly Johnson ³¹	LS



Allan Joseph
Editor-in-Chief



Andrew Owens
Assistant Managing Editor



Chris Allen
Sports Editor

Wow. Notre Dame. Alabama. A crystal football on the line. It’s an unbelievable matchup between two unbelievable teams. Championship-winning football teams ride their defense. They avoid mistakes. And they make plays when it matters most.

Both squads fit that bill, but the Irish are rightfully underdogs. Nick Saban has earned the right to be favored in any game, and Alabama has an unbelievable amount of talent packing its roster.

Yet there’s something special going on. I can’t deny it, and I’d be foolish to pick against it. The Crimson Tide have shown just enough weaknesses to be vulnerable, and with the game on the line, there’s no unit I trust more than Manti Te’o’s defense. Notre Dame will win the national title. Wow, indeed.

This one should be a game for the ages. Anyone who has watched Alabama or Notre Dame this season knows it won’t be a blowout either way. The Tide’s 1-2 rushing combination has yet to face a front seven as physical as Notre Dame’s, while sophomore quarterback Everett Golson’s stiffest challenge comes in the season finale. If the Irish are to surprise the college football world, they need to score touchdowns in the red zone.

In the championship game, the teams are typically more or less even, so it comes down to preparation and focus. Nick Saban and Brian Kelly’s squads will certainly have that, so it very well could come down to the final possession as Notre Dame chases the most unlikely of what would be 12 national championships.

This season has been one big storybook tale for Notre Dame and its fans. Like any good storybook, the ending has to have a triumph over a great and powerful villain. Alabama is the ultimate power in college football — and it is one win away from staking a claim to a true dynasty. The question everyone will eagerly wait to see answered is: Do the Irish have it in them to take down the mighty Alabama and write the storybook ending?

I see no reason why the Irish can’t pull off a victory for the ages. Notre Dame’s identity all season has come from its front seven. They will rule the day and bottle up Alabama’s rushers, forcing A.J. McCarron to win the game with his arm. He won’t. Notre Dame will punctuate the most remarkable season in its history with a win.

O HEAD



NO. 1 NOTRE DAME



SARAH O'CONNOR | 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.)
2 Chris Brown (Fr.)

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

RT 74 Christian Lombard (Jr.)
72 Nick Martin (So.)

RG 57 Mike Golic Jr. (Gr.)
51 Bruce Heggie (Jr.)

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.)

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 has guided the Irish to an undefeated record by tossing for 2,135 yards, 11 touchdowns and five interceptions. But now, the first-year starter will face his toughest test yet in Alabama's top-ranked defense.

The Crimson Tide bring in the nation's No. 6 pass defense, giving up just 166.2 yards per game through the air. Senior safety Robert Lester and sophomore safety HaHa Clinton-Dix lead Alabama with four interceptions apiece. The Crimson Tide have 17 as a team and have held four opponents (Arkansas, Florida Atlantic, Western Carolina and Auburn) to less than 100 yards passing.

Sophomore linebacker Adrian Hubbard leads Alabama with six sacks on the season from his outside rushing position. The Crimson Tide have five players with more than three sacks each and have totaled 33 on the season, good for 26th in the NCAA.

The Irish, meanwhile, boast a bevy of capable receivers, with senior tight end Tyler Eifert leading the way. The Mackey Award winner tallied 44 catches for 624 yards and four touchdowns. Of Eifert's 44 receptions, 33 have been good for either a first down or a touchdown. That figure is second to only junior receiver T.J. Jones' 35. Eifert and Jones help make up a group of five Irish receivers with more than 20 catches.

EDGE: ALABAMA

IRISH RUSHING

While most people are looking at this matchup on the other side of the ball, the Irish may be able to control the time of possession by owning the ground game. Notre Dame has evolved over coach Brian Kelly's tenure from an air-it-out spread team to a grind-it-out power squad.

Senior running backs Theo Riddick and Cierre Wood have combined for 1,620 yards and nine touchdowns and have carried the load for an Irish rushing attack that averages 202.5 yards per game. Sophomore running back George Atkinson has averaged 7.1 yards per carry while scoring five touchdowns and Golson has also chipped in on the ground. He has 305 yards and five touchdowns.

Alabama, meanwhile, brings in the No. 4 rushing defense in the country, yielding

just 92.4 yards per game. BYU leads the country in that statistic (84.2 yards per game) and the Irish torched the Cougars for 270 yards on 43 carries in a 17-14 Notre Dame win.

The Crimson Tide have allowed an opponent to top 100 yards only three times out of 13, including holding Missouri to three rushing yards. In their 29-24 loss to Texas A&M, the Crimson Tide gave up 165 rushing yards on 46 attempts.

Junior linebacker C.J. Mosley leads the Alabama defense with 99 tackles, including seven for loss and four sacks. The Crimson Tide boast five players with more than 50 tackles this season.

EDGE: EVEN

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

Alabama defensive coordinator Kirby Smart has been an integral part to Nick Saban's national championship runs in both 2011 and 2009. Smart, along with Notre Dame's Bob Diaco, figures to get his shot at running a marquee program very soon. Chuck Martin and Brian Kelly have done a good job this year but are not up to Smart's level.

EDGE: ALABAMA

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

Sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza is tied for third in the country in field goals per game, which is more a knock on the Irish offense than a plus for Brindza. The Irish average 2.4 yards per punt return and 20.0 yards per kick return. Those figures are 115th and 84th in the nation, respectively. Senior Ben Turk averages 40.6 yards per punt.

EDGE: ALABAMA

IRISH SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	vs. Navy	W 50-10
Sept. 8	Purdue	W 20-17
Sept. 15	@ Michigan State	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	W 30-13
Nov. 3	Pittsburgh	W 29-26 (3OT)
Nov. 10	@ Boston College	W 21-6
Nov. 17	Wake Forest	W 38-0
Nov. 24	@ USC	W 22-13
Jan. 7	vs. Alabama	



Andrew Gastelum
Associate Sports Editor



Matthew DeFranks
Associate Sports Editor

This game is going to be an all-out showdown. This game will make you tired just from watching it. This game will not be pretty, and Notre Dame shines in these types of games.

Notre Dame's chances in this game will depend on its offensive line. The front five will have to pave the way for a running game that is the only hope for the Irish. It will also have to protect Everett Golson on key conversions. But its success will also keep the ball from a very underrated Alabama offense.

This game will see Golson start his legend, Manti Te'o seal his legend and Brian Kelly become a legend. I cannot believe I am writing this, but somehow this game will crown Notre Dame as champion.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 24, Alabama 23

No one could have seen this coming: the two most storied programs in college football history playing in the national title game a season removed from an 8-5 season for the Irish. No one could have seen coming after the Crimson Tide fell to Texas A&M at home a month ago. But here we are, set to watch Notre Dame and Alabama tussle and tug and grind in a national championship game that will please purists everywhere.

This game is not about SEC speed or the SEC's superiority or Nick Saban's championship pedigree to go along with his Napoleon complex. This game is about the running games and the rushing defenses — which plays to the strengths of both teams. But this season has been too perfect for the Irish to not actually be perfect.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 19, Alabama 17

2

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WIN
NUMBER

3

SEPT. 15



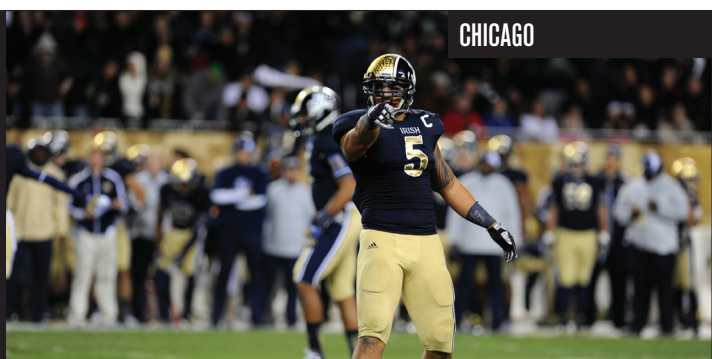
EAST LANSING, MICH.

NOTRE DAME 20, MICHIGAN STATE 3

WIN
NUMBER

5

OCT. 6



CHICAGO

NOTRE DAME 41, MIAMI 3

WIN
NUMBER

7

OCT. 20



SOUTH BEND

NOTRE DAME 17, BYU 14

WIN
NUMBER

9

NOV. 3



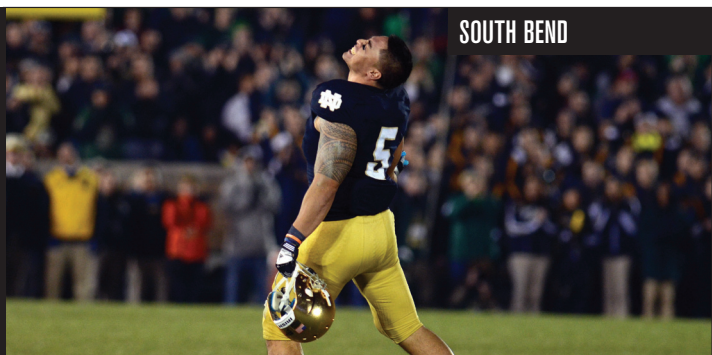
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NOTRE DAME 29, PITTSBURGH 26 (30T)

WIN
NUMBER

11

NOV. 17



SOUTH BEND

NOTRE DAME 38, WAKE FOREST 0

WIN
NUMBER

2

SEPT. 8



SOUTH BEND

NOTRE DAME 20, PURDUE 17

WIN
NUMBER

4

SEPT. 22



SOUTH BEND

NOTRE DAME 13, MICHIGAN 6

WIN
NUMBER

6

OCT. 13



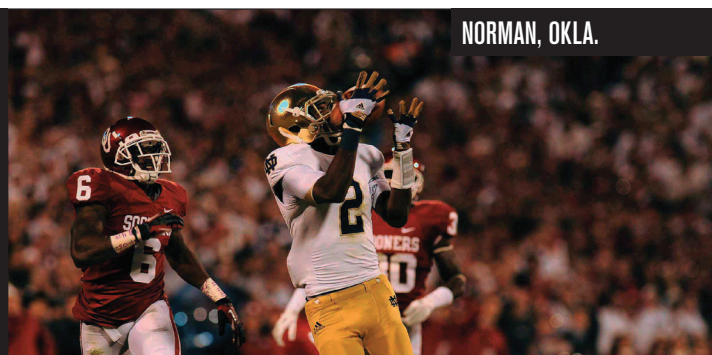
SOUTH BEND

NOTRE DAME 20, STANFORD 13 (OT)

WIN
NUMBER

8

OCT. 27



NORMAN, OKLA.

NOTRE DAME 30, OKLAHOMA 13

WIN
NUMBER

10

NOV. 10



CHESTNUT HILL, MASS.

NOTRE DAME 21, BOSTON COLLEGE 6

WIN
NUMBER

12

NOV. 24



LOS ANGELES

NOTRE DAME 22, USC 13

FINDING ROCKNE

A JOURNEY TO FIND THE MAN BEHIND THE LEGEND

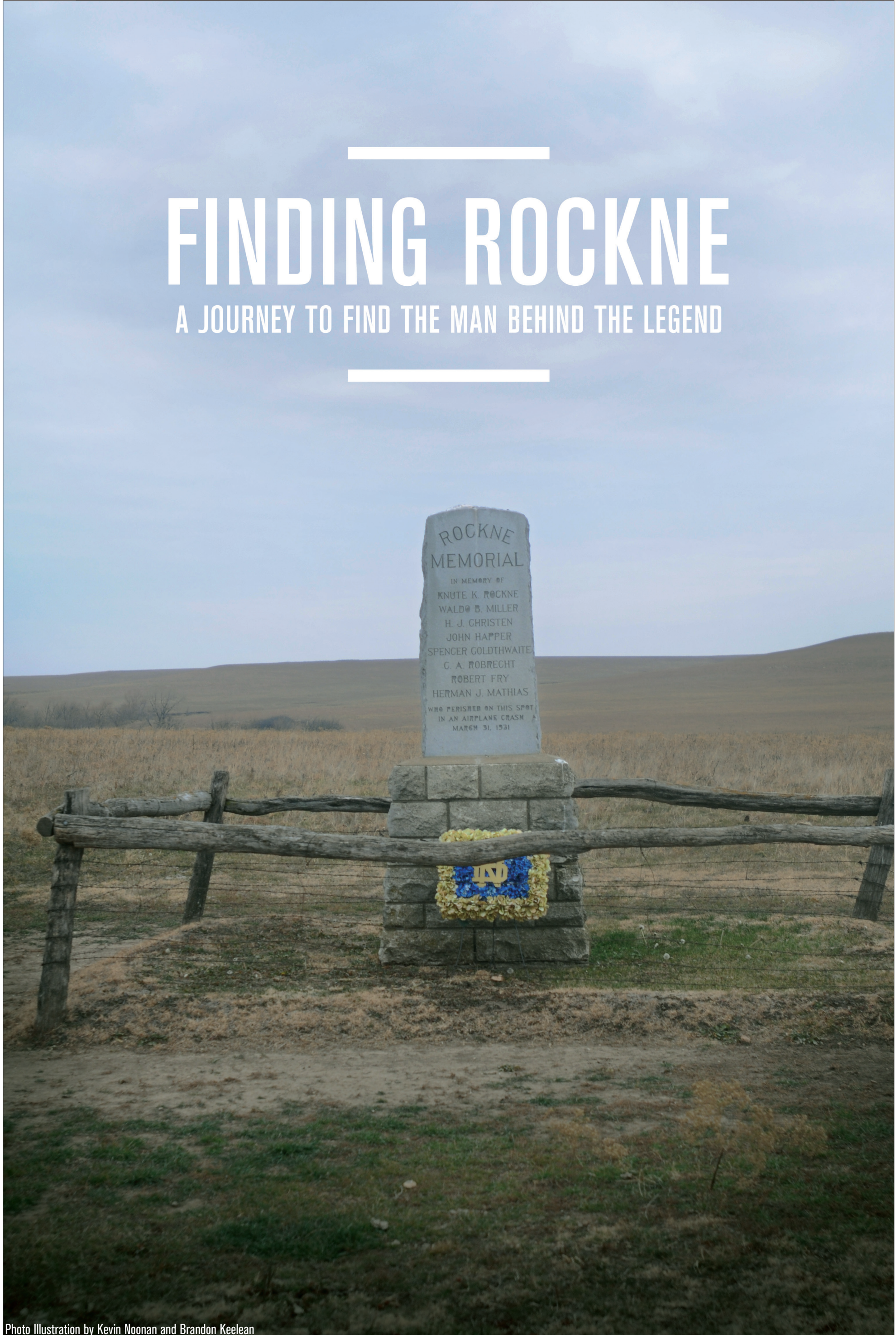
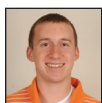


Photo Illustration by Kevin Noonan and Brandon Keelean

KNUTE ROCKNE, THE MAN

Everyone knows the tales of Knute Rockne's coaching career. But who was he?



Andrew Owens
Assistant Managing Editor

BAZAAR, Kan. — It's no secret that Notre Dame is a place chock-full of mystique. As with many places that are tradition-laden, people stop asking "Why?" about certain questions and just accept it because it's the way it's always been. Don't walk up the front steps of the Main Building or you won't graduate. If you walk around the lake with a significant other, you better be ready to marry her. Don't tread on the God Quad grass, or else.

At what point do we lose our curiosity?

I've always been intrigued by Knute Rockne's place in Notre Dame lore. We know he went 105-12-5 and won three national championships, popularized the forward pass and put Notre Dame on the map, both in football and as a University. But what do we know about the man?

With Notre Dame's 12-0 season and impending national championship berth, I've grown increasingly inquisitive about who the man who got the ball rolling for the nation's most storied program. I, like so many others, didn't choose to attend Notre Dame because of football, but the sport is what put Notre Dame on the map. If it weren't for Rockne, how many of the 8,452 undergraduate students currently attending the University would actually be here?

I realized just how little I know about the man who started it all. Rockne is forever immortalized in bronze form outside the tunnel on the north side of Notre Dame Stadium. Realizing Irish coach Brian Kelly is one win away from getting his own statue someday, I considered what parallels, if any, exist between the two men.

It's unfathomable to think of a seemingly immortal Brian Kelly, but is that how he too will be viewed someday if he wins in Miami on Jan. 7? Will he be perceived as a man of destiny for Notre Dame, pulled by unseen forces to South Bend to fix the program after the failures of Davie, Willingham and Weis?

I've witnessed Brian Kelly in action the past three seasons. I've seen Brian Kelly struggle, fail and, in his third season, lead the Irish to within a game of adding a 12th national championship banner to the tunnel. I've seen Brian Kelly alienate the players recruited by the previous regime before ultimately endearing himself to them. I've seen him deal with tragedy and heartbreak. Through the highs and the lows, we've seen Brian Kelly the man.

I realized I needed to go find Knute Rockne the man.

I started at the end, the site of Rockne's grave at Highland Cemetery, a few miles west of campus. It's December in South Bend, and while snow had yet to hit the region, it is nonetheless a frigid day. The grass at the cemetery is not the luscious green you find during the summertime; it is transitioning to a season in which it will be covered by a

snowy blanket.

Rockne's headstone is unremarkable in that it is no different from any other one at Highland Cemetery. It reads: "KNUTE K. ROCKNE," and lists him not as coach, but as "FATHER" above his name. Football is the source of his fame, but not of his identity. In the bottom left corner, his birth year, 1888, is engraved and the year of his death, 1931, in the bottom right corner. Some of the corners have been chipped off, probably by Notre Dame fans looking for a keepsake to cherish the myth.

But a headstone is hardly a glimpse into a man's life. Needing to quench my desire for more information on who this man was, I headed to Notre Dame Archives on the sixth floor of Hesburgh Library. I discovered Rockne wrote guest columns for different publications, including Notre Dame's own Scholastic Magazine. The topics ranged from the virtue of collegiate athletics to football strategy.

In one of his accounts, when recalling his initial reaction to a friend's suggestion that he play football at Notre Dame, Rockne said, "Who ever heard of Notre Dame? They've never won a football game in their lives."

But of course he ultimately decided to attend Notre Dame and, looking through the archives, I can't imagine what the University in 1912 would look like had he chosen another path.

When perusing through items related to the airplane crash in which Rockne died, the most striking visual was a photograph of Rockne's rosary. The black rosary snapped in two places on impact and the bottom of the miniature crucifix is bent. When

authorities arrived at the scene of the plane crash, they found him clutching it in his hand.

What was swirling through Rockne's mind as the plane plunged to the frozen earth below? Notre Dame? His family? His mortality? A prayer?

Rockne boarded the F10 plane in Kansas City at 9:15 a.m. on March 31, 1931. It was an icy day, and the pilot lost control of the plane when ice froze over the left wing in Bazaar, Kan., 140 miles southwest of Kansas City.

Fourteen-year-old Easter Heathman heard the plane above but could not find it in the cloudy sky. He heard the wooden plane carrying eight people tumble into the hillside. Each one died instantly.

Later in the 1930s, a memorial was constructed at the site in to honor Rockne and the seven others who perished at the scene. Heathman maintained the grounds from then through his 2008 death. The University honored him in 2006 for his service with an honorary monogram.

Rockne and his team always returned to a boisterous crowd of thousands at Union Station in South Bend after prevailing in an important road game. The final time he arrived at Union Station, it was in a casket. Nonetheless, thousands gathered. This time, it wasn't in support of Knute Rockne the coach. It was in support of Knute Rockne the man and the wife and children he predeceased.

In order to fully find Rockne, I needed to drive Bazaar, Kan., and see and feel the memorial for myself. How could I expect to



KEVIN NOONAN | The Observer

A simple set of stones marks the spot where Knute Rockne's body was found following the plane crash that killed him and seven others.



KEVIN NOONAN | The Observer

Kay Sizelove, a lifelong Notre Dame fan, speaks about her father, who ran track under Rockne in the early 1920s.



KEVIN NOONAN | The Observer

Sr. Anthony Wargel, an Ursuline nun, displays a signed picture of Brian Kelly and the green rosary she prays during every Irish game.



KEVIN NOONAN | The Observer

A portion of the F10 plane Rockne died in is displayed at the Chase County Historical Museum in Cottonwood Falls, Kan. The wooden, cloth-winged plane was headed from Kansas City to Los Angeles, where Rockne was scheduled to participate in a film promoting Notre Dame athletics.

truly understand the man unless I traveled into his past to the location of his untimely death?

Observer colleague Kevin Noonan and I drove more than 1,700 miles in three days across the Midwest and into the Great Plains to find Knute Rockne. Easter's son, Tom, now leads occasional tours to the site. ("My dad always said, 'I've taken a lot of people up here, and not one of them was a dud.'")

It's Saturday afternoon, and we park at a one-room schoolhouse in Bazaar to meet him.

He arrives in a black pickup truck and tells us we should all ride together, "because the rental car won't make it on this terrain."

We hop in the truck and Tom drives toward the site. Kansas is experiencing a pretty rough drought, so the ground is dry and the grass yellow. In order to reach the memorial, he opens two gates that are locked with a combination to keep horses and

cattle inside.

We trek through the bumpy trail, and after a few minutes we can see the memorial atop the hill.

Upon sight, we are speechless. Nothing but plains stretch beyond the memorial for miles. Engraved on the granite monument are eight names. Atop the list it reads, "ROCKNE MEMORIAL." There is a small wiry fence around the monument Easter constructed years ago to protect it from the cattle.

Even today you'll find bits of glass from the plane sitting atop the soil. It was a cloudy day when we were there, but Tom said when the sun shines or the rain pours down, you can see the hill shine from miles away.

Perched atop the hill, the world comes to a halt. I picked up a couple small shards of glass, and was immediately humbled as I realized I was handling one of the last remaining physical connections to Knute Rockne, the man.

Suddenly, it all makes sense. Rockne needed to die a heroic

death for the myth to be this grand and everlasting.

While his name is the only one remembered of the eight who died in the crash, in that moment he was just as vulnerable and helpless as the others aboard the flight. When it dove into the hill in the middle of America with nothing around them, Knute Rockne the man ceased to exist, but the legend found a new beginning.

On the trip back to South Bend, we stop near Kansas City to meet Kay Sizelove. Her father, Paul Kennedy, ran track for Rockne from during the early 1920s. He was the team captain and an accomplished mile runner.

On one occasion, when the team was aboard a train to South Bend after a meet, Rockne pulled Kennedy aside. He asked him to join him in a different compartment. Kennedy was worried he had done something wrong and wondered why the coach singled him out.

When they reached the adjacent room, they sat down and Rockne looked into Kennedy's eyes.

"I need your help, Paul," he said. "My wife and my anniversary is coming up soon. I don't know what to get her.

"What should I get her, Paul?"

Even when Rockne was in his element, among his athletic squads, he could not help but think of his wife.

After meeting with Kay, we took an indirect route back to

South Bend and met Sr. Anthony Wargel, a 98-year-old Ursuline nun, in Louisville. A lifelong Notre Dame fan (she paces with her walker while watching the Irish play), she remembers the national impact of Rockne's death when she was a 17-year-old girl growing up in Evansville, Ind.

As a woman who has devoted her life to religion, Wargel considers Rockne's faith to have been his most striking characteristic.

"He was so inspired that the boys would always make it to Sunday Mass, regardless of when or where they played, that he converted to Catholicism," Wargel said. "That tells you about a place like Notre Dame."

Rockne converted to Catholicism in 1925 (in fact, he was baptized on campus in St. Edward's Hall), and just six years later, as a 43-year-old man, he died clutching a rosary.

He wasn't just a football coach. He was a God-fearing man who worried about what to get his wife for their anniversary and where to spend time with his children.

That's Knute Rockne the man. As the days pass by, that image fades from our consciousness and the mythic figure builds. Even his grandchildren don't know who Knute Rockne the man was. Pretty soon all we will have are legends and tales.

When I return to South Bend, I call Knute's grandson, Nils Rockne, who resides in San Antonio. His father, Jack, was 5 years old when Knute was killed in the plane crash, so even he

had limited memories of his father to share with Nils.

As I explain to Nils my search for his grandfather, he interrupts me.

"Excuse me, but I have to correct you. You're saying my grandfather's name wrong. It's 'Kuh-newt' Rockne, not 'Newt' Rockne."

It says a lot about how his myth has perpetuated that we don't even pronounce Rockne's name correctly.

The only vivid memory Jack passed down to Nils was playing on a Miami beach in March of 1931: Knute the father enjoying a respite from football season with Bonnie and their sons, oblivious to the impending tragedy that would shake a family and a university and consume the nation.

There, in Miami, Knute Rockne the man existed for what would only be a few more days. The man would soon be replaced by myth and legend in an obscure Kansas field.

There, in Miami, Brian Kelly will descend on Jan. 7 to try and secure his position among Notre Dame immortals with Rockne, Leahy, Parseghan, Devine and Holtz.

There, in Miami, the birth of the Brian Kelly myth can take place. If he wins, his story will span generations to come. If he wins, when the man is gone, only the myth will remain.

Contact Andrew Owens at aowens2@nd.edu

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

Sports writer Kevin Noonan contributed to this report.



KEVIN NOONAN | The Observer

The Chase County Historical Museum has an exhibit dedicated to Knute Rockne's life and includes parts of the plane Rockne died in.

Alabama fans harbor hatred for Irish

NOTRE DAME VS. THE SOUTH

VS.		ALABAMA	5-1
	IN BOWLS	2-0	
	LAST GAME	W, 37-6, 1987	
VS.	SEC	26-17	
	IN BOWLS	5-4	
	LAST GAME	L, 41-14, 2007 TO LSU	

BRANDON KEELEAN | The Observer

By **MATTHEW DeFRANKS**
Associate Sports Editor

Paul Finebaum hosts a wildly popular radio show in the South, has his own radio network and has been called "The Voice of the SEC." But Finebaum has something most SEC fans do not — an affinity for Notre Dame.

"I'll say this quietly but I've always been a big fan of Notre Dame," Finebaum said. "Growing up, Notre Dame was always the school."

As No. 1 Notre Dame prepares to face No. 2 Alabama in the BCS National Championship Game in Miami on Jan. 7, Southern fans are ratcheting up the disdain for Notre Dame, even though the two schools have not played since 1987.

"Alabama fans are still upset about 1966 when Notre Dame stole a national championship from them and they're still talking about 1973," Finebaum said. "There's not a lot of love here among the fan base for Notre Dame."

In 1966, former Irish coach Ara Parseghian went for the tie against No. 2 Michigan State in the second-to-last game of the season instead of the win. The tie gave Notre Dame the national title, and in doing so, took it away from Alabama.

The Irish hold a 5-1 all-time edge over the Crimson Tide, including wins in the 1973 Sugar Bowl and the 1974 Orange Bowl. The two schools combine to claim 25 national championships.

Marquavius Burnett, sports editor at The Crimson White, the student newspaper at Alabama, said the history of two of college football's most storied programs adds to the game.

"You got Bear Bryant, you got Knute Rockne," Burnett said. "All the history behind this matchup was Notre Dame leading the series 5-1. I think a lot of Alabama fans who do remember those times want this one really bad."

Burnett said many of Alabama's students are not taking Notre Dame very seriously.

"A lot of the students are

looking at this like it's going to be one of the easiest national championships Alabama has ever gotten and I just don't think that's true," Burnett said.

"A lot of students see it as 'Well, if we can get past LSU, if we can get past Georgia.' And then you see the Vegas lines that had been saying every top-10 SEC team would be a favorite against Notre Dame and our students see that and kind of disrespect Notre Dame a little bit."

Most of, if not all, students at both Notre Dame and Alabama have never witnessed Notre Dame as a perennial national power. The Irish have not won a national championship since 1988 and, prior to this season, had not been ranked No. 1 since 1993.

"It hasn't been since Lou Holtz, before you and I were born, back in the 80s when Notre Dame was truly a national power," Burnett said. "I'm not talking about winning some games and being in the [national championship] conversation. I'm talking about truly one of the dominant programs in college football. It's been a really long time. At least not in my lifetime. Down South, I think people just feel like Notre Dame isn't worthy of a national championship."

Finebaum also said Notre Dame's recent history has led to its current reputation as a school that sits on a pedestal and is annually overrated.

"People down here, I don't think they know what to make out of Notre Dame. I think some of it is embedded in them from the past," Finebaum said.

Recently, it has been the Crimson Tide and coach Nick Saban who have built a dynasty, winning two of the last three championships while vying for another one this year.

"In some respects, Alabama has replaced Notre Dame as that school in college football everyone's trying to beat," Finebaum said.

Alabama has not only become the standard nationally, but also in the cutthroat SEC, which has produced the last six national champions. Fans in the South

have tried to relate Notre Dame to an SEC school.

"I still think Alabama fans look at Notre Dame and go 'Well, how would they do in the SEC? Could they have survived the gauntlet of LSU and [Texas] A&M or Georgia?'" Finebaum said.

The fact that Notre Dame does not belong to a conference — and does not have to play a conference championship game — is also a sticking point for Alabama fans, Burnett said.

"I still believe the perception in the South is that Notre Dame gets to play 12 regular season games, yes, but they don't have a conference so they don't have that 13th game where an Alabama goes to play a hard-fought game against Georgia that takes a lot out of a team," he said. "But Notre Dame gets to go 12-0 and they're in the national championship regardless whether they win a conference or not."

"That's not Notre Dame's fault, they have a sweet deal, television-wise. Everybody wants them to be included but at the same time, down South, people think that Notre Dame hasn't really been challenged to the level of an Alabama or some of these other teams that week-in and week-out have to go through the SEC conference."

Although the Irish do not belong to the SEC, they have used an SEC plan to construct a team based on tough defense, a strong

running game and a game manager quarterback.

"I think they're built just like an SEC team," Burnett said. "The only question I have is do they have that elite SEC speed that sets teams apart like Florida or LSU?"

Finebaum said, despite Alabama and Notre Dame's similarities, hating the Irish is just engrained in the Crimson

Tide faithful.

"Sometimes you have to understand that if you've never been outside the South, Notre Dame is just something you grew up hating. And quite frankly, a lot of Alabama fans, because of the past, grew up hating Notre Dame."

Contact **Matthew DeFranks** at mdefrank@nd.edu

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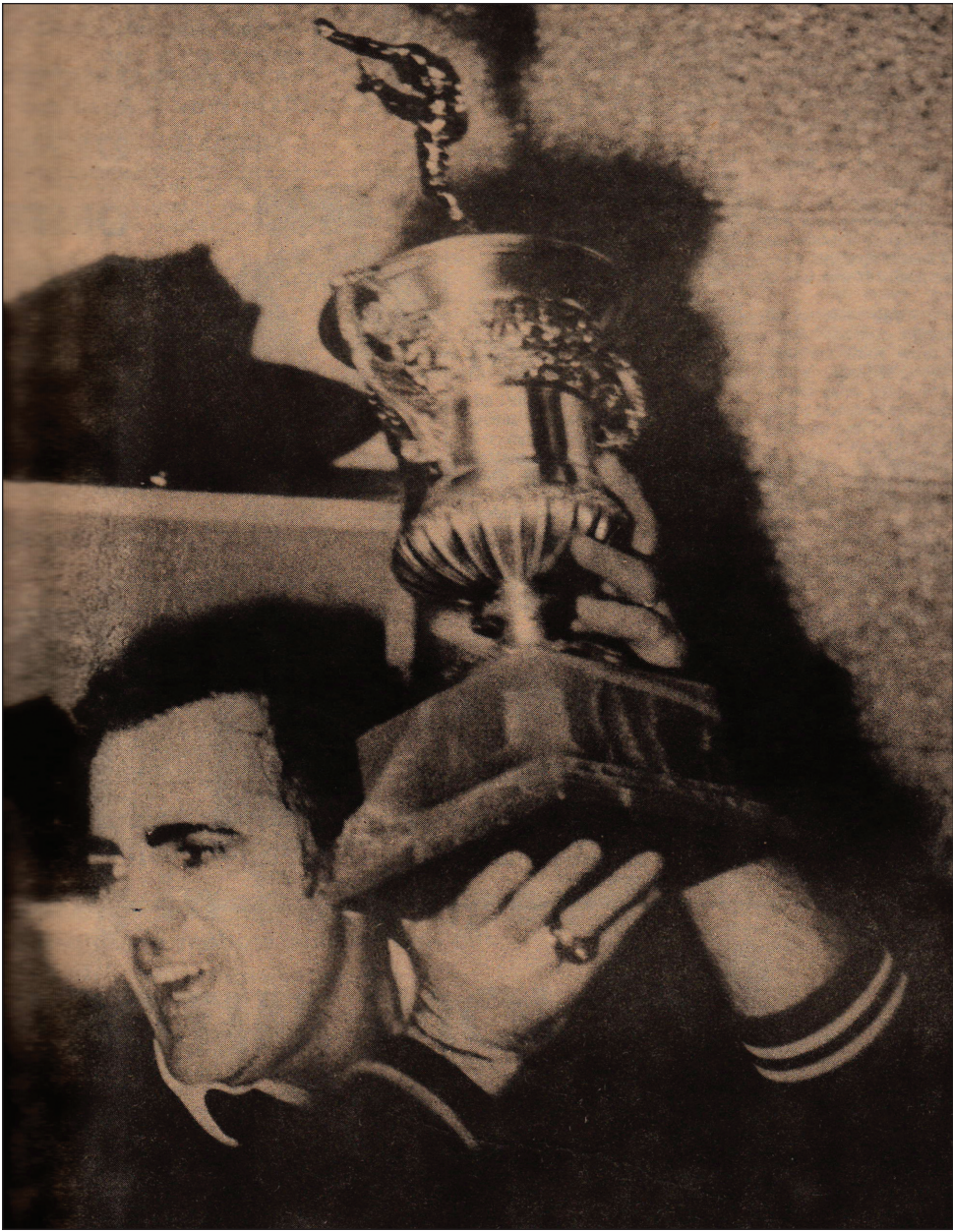
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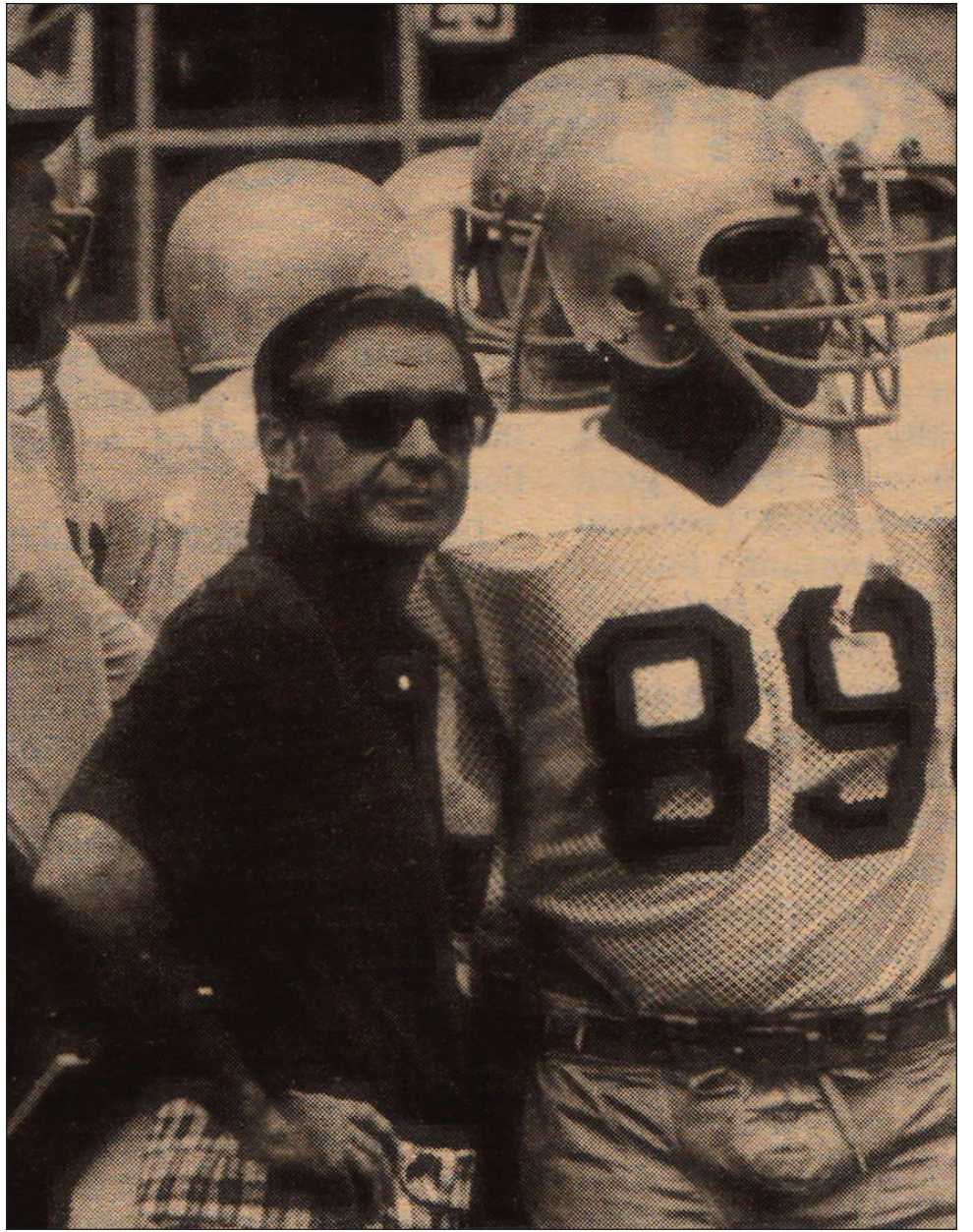
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Observer File Photo

Former Irish coach Ara Parseghian lifts the Sugar Bowl trophy after Notre Dame's 24-23 win over Alabama in 1973. The win gave Notre Dame the national title.



Observer File Photo

Former Irish coach Dan Devine patrols the sideline in 1977. Devine and the Irish won the national title that year and Devine finished his career at Notre Dame 53-16-1.

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WAKING THE ECHOES | LOU HOLTZ

Holtz retells story of '88 title team



Observer File Photo

Former Irish coach Lou Holtz guides quarterback Tony Rice during Notre Dame's 34-21 win over West Virginia in the 1989 Fiesta Bowl.

By **MATTHEW DeFRANKS**

Associate Sports Editor

Lou Holtz had an undefeated Irish team that had already beat Michigan, Miami and USC, so the preparations for the 1989 Fiesta Bowl were simple — rest the seniors, take pictures and practice celebrations.

Holtz, the former Irish coach whose 1988 team finished 12-0 and as consensus national champions, took to a few unorthodox measures to prepare Notre Dame for a showdown with undefeated West Virginia, including not practicing the seniors for three weekends during the long layoff before the bowl game.

"We felt this, we could not maintain the same momentum we had so we had to treat that like a one-game season," Holtz said in a phone interview with The Observer. "I loved their preparation because the first three weekends, I didn't practice the seniors."

Notre Dame's seniors entered their final season under the Golden Dome with an uninspiring 18-16 record but came to life in Holtz's third season, carrying the team with them. But, before and after the Fiesta Bowl, it would be the underclassmen carrying the seniors — literally.

"I assigned each underclassman a senior to carry off the field after we won," Holtz said. "We worked on carrying the seniors off the field after we won. I just wanted to be in a good mental state that we were going to win this game and there was

no doubt.

"We practiced that. This is what we're going to do when we win and this is how we're going to handle it: Carry the seniors off the field. They're the ones that provided the leadership for us. That also sent a message to the players that we were confident."

The current ESPN college football analyst also said the day before the bowl game, the Irish spent the day taking pictures with each other in the stadium.

Holtz and the Notre Dame coaching staff kept the Irish on a tight schedule during the extended 37-day break. After scrimmaging on Dec. 22, they reviewed the tape the morning of Dec. 23 before sending the players home for Christmas that afternoon. The team reassembled in Tempe, Ariz., on Christmas night after the Irish spent the morning with their families.

"Then we had our game plan and all we had to do was perfect it," Holtz said. "We didn't have to teach anything, just perfect it, keep them sharp, work on fundamentals. When game time came, it was a one-game season. We were ready."

The Irish had already navigated a tough schedule that featured defending national champion and powerhouse Miami and rivals Michigan and USC. All three teams were ranked in the top 10.

But it was after a 30-20 win over a mediocre Pittsburgh squad that Holtz realized he had a special team on his

hands.

"Just the way they competed, they were on the road in a difficult situation," Holtz said. "They knew something about winning and competing and they hung in there together."

The following week, Notre Dame had to face Miami, perhaps the most hated team not only in South Bend but also the country. Holtz enlisted the services, and advice, of Michigan coach Bo Schembechler, whose Wolverines had already fallen to both Notre Dame and Miami.

"I had called Bo prior to the Miami game and I said, 'Bo, how good is Miami?' and he said, 'They're awfully good,'" Holtz said. "I said, 'Do we have a chance to beat them?' and he said, 'Yeah, you're going to have to play a good game but yeah, you can beat them.'"

"After the Pittsburgh game, the confidence of talking to Bo, I felt we really had a chance to do something special. We played such a difficult schedule, every week it was just another battle and we had to find a way to get through it."

So when Notre Dame had to face yet another undefeated team in the Fiesta Bowl, the Irish felt no additional pressure.

"You always have pressure," Holtz said. "We were there on a mission. It's easier to keep them focused when you're playing for a national championship than if you're just playing in a bowl game."

Notre Dame jumped out

"There is no tomorrow, there is no looking at film, practicing, no more, it's over. It's done. It just felt like a burden off your shoulders."

Lou Holtz
former Irish coach

to an early 16-0 lead on the Mountaineers and never looked back despite a late West Virginia rally, cruising to a 34-21 win and the school's first national championship in 11 seasons.

Just as he wanted the seniors to be carried off, Holtz himself was lifted in the air after the win.

"The first thing you're worried about is them dropping you," Holtz said. "You don't know if they have a good hold of you."

Holtz said the emotions after the game were tough to describe.

"You don't realize the impact that winning the national championship at Notre Dame," he said. "You never rely on yourself to say 'This is what it's going to be like' or 'This is how I'm going to feel.' You're just

constantly prepared."

That impact finally hit Holtz in a locker room overflowing with exuberant players, trustees and other University administrators.

"There is no tomorrow, there is no looking at film, practicing, no more, it's over. It's done," Holtz said. "It just felt like a burden off your shoulders."

But still 24 years later, it feels as if that burden has been placed back on Notre Dame's shoulders as they prepare to face No. 2 Alabama in the BCS National Championship Game in Miami on Jan. 7.

Holtz said he never envisioned the Irish would go that far between national title game appearances but said it is good

for college football when they do.

"I'll tell you this, it's great for college football when Notre Dame is on top," he said.

"I've been going up to ESPN for eight years and have to eat in restaurants and there are about five or six restaurants I rotate. I think eight years, no one's ever said a word to me. All of a sudden, I've got waitresses, the same waitresses that having been waiting on me for eight years, saying 'Boy, what a great year for Notre Dame. Do you think they can win?' They don't know anything about football. That's because of Notre Dame."

Contact **Matthew DeFranks** at mdefrank@nd.edu

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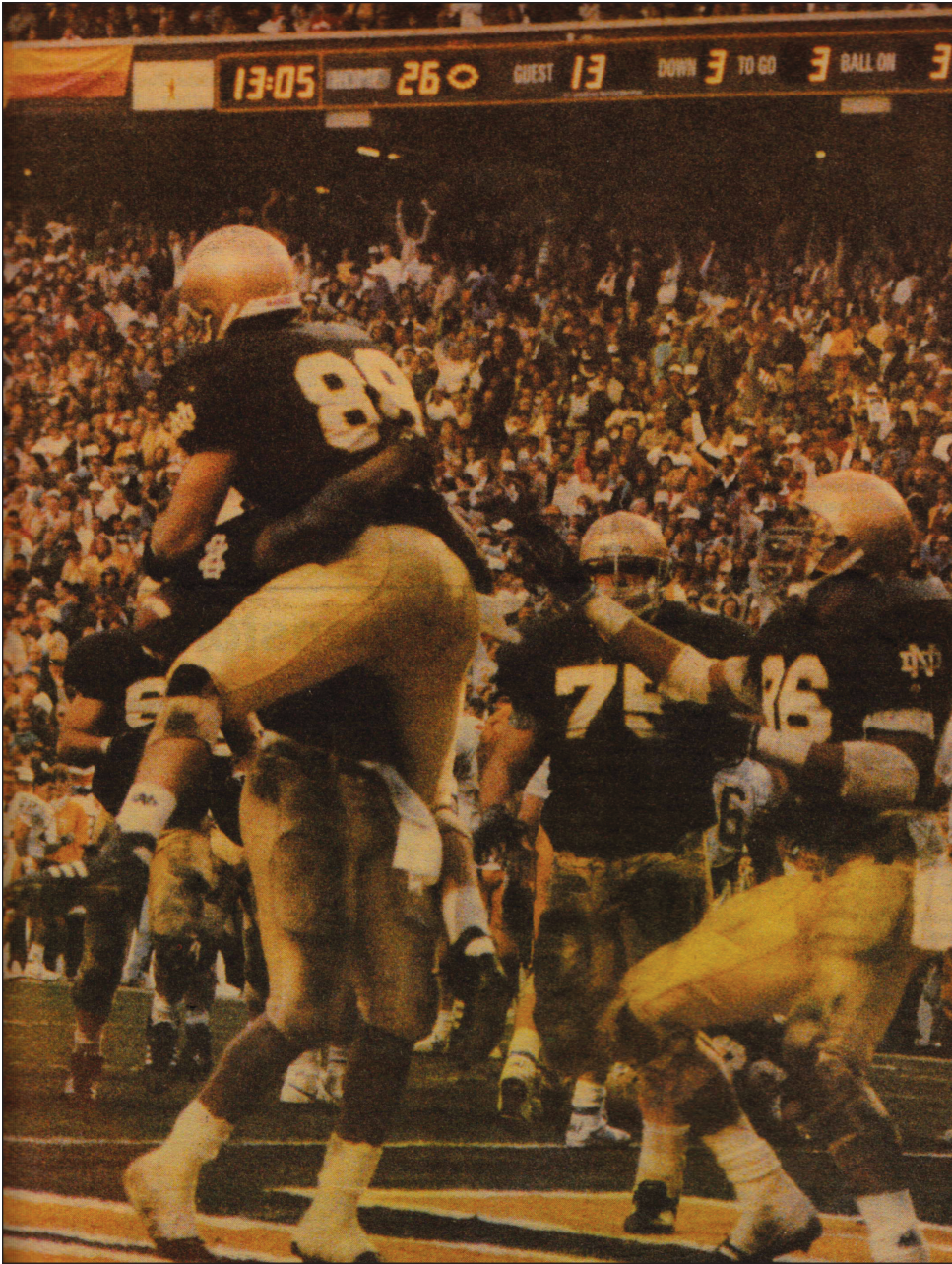
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1988 NATIONAL CHAMPIONS



Observer File Photos

In 1988, the Irish navigated a schedule that featured four top-10 opponents to finish 12-0 and win the school's first national title since 1977. Quarterback Tony Rice, top right, led Notre Dame with 1,389 passing yards and 775 rushing yards. The Irish defense gave up only 13 points per game and held four opponents to less than 10 points.



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