

IRISH INSIDER

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2015



EVOLUTION AND ADAPTATION

C.J. Prosise makes early splash in new role as starting running back

THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Erin Rice and Rosie Biehl



VS



COMMENTARY

Kelly must innovate without Folston



Brian Plamondon
Sports Writer

Let's get this out of the way first: No matter how bad Texas looked last Saturday night, Notre Dame was impressive in all facets of the game.

To be expected, the Irish are getting love from the polls (No. 9), pundits (Kirk Herbstreit has them as his No. 4 team after week one) and even the computers, where ESPN's Football Power Index says only Ohio State, Baylor and TCU have a better chance of finishing the regular season undefeated.

Although the rankings may be warranted at the moment, does Notre Dame have a shot to live up to all the hype now that workhorse Tarean Folston is done for the year with a torn ACL? Is the College Football Playoff still on the horizon, or is it a distant dream?

The easy answer to those questions is, we'll wait and see.

The more complicated answer is that it all depends on head coach Brian Kelly and the offensive play calling.

For as good as Malik Zaire was against the Longhorns, it still was only his second career start. Plain and simple, the Irish won't get to where they want to go by altering their game plan in Folston's absence by having Zaire launch the ball downfield 35 to 40 times a game.

Kelly knows how to deal with an inexperienced quarterback, as evidenced by his approach to Everett Golson during the 2012 undefeated regular season. Drawing on that blueprint, Kelly must find a way to take pressure off the running backs without heaping everything on Zaire's arm. One answer may lie in Zaire's legs, however. His nine carries for 16 yards won't cut it when Folston and Greg Bryant aren't a part of the offense anymore.

"[Zaire] should have been nine carries for 60, 70 yards, maybe more," Kelly said during his Tuesday press conference. "There's a lot of room for improvement in there — he's very capable."

Although the reflex reaction after a top running back goes down is to ease in the backup and shift to throwing the football, Kelly should instead

double down on the running game. It's no coincidence the best season on the ground in the Brian Kelly era was in 2012, when the Irish averaged 4.9 yards per rush while racking up 2,462 total yards — 377 more yards than any other year.

While Notre Dame did rush the ball 52 times against Texas, it only averaged 4.1 yards per carry. While respectable, that number needs to go up.

One answer?

Kelly, offensive coordinator Mike Sanford and their creativity with the offense.

Without Folston, a player who could have carried the ball 25 times a game when asked, the offense needs to be innovative in the running game. That could include jet sweeps, trusting Zaire more with the read option or getting slot receiver Amir Carlisle, a former running back, a few carries. It could even include getting the deep crop of other receivers involved — what team wouldn't be thrown off by Will Fuller and his 4.3 speed in the backfield?

Most importantly, Kelly must commit to a multifaceted attack in the backfield. Looking back at 2012 again, the Irish had three running backs with over 50 carries. There shouldn't be any worry about converted slot receiver C.J. Prosise as the starter — Theo Riddick made the same move in 2012 — but he certainly can't do it alone. Freshman Josh Adams, and even his classmate Dexter Williams, must be utilized in Folston's absence.

It's not often that a team's Doak Walker Award watch list running back can go down with it still harboring national championship hopes, but that can be the case with Notre Dame. The Irish have the talent across the board to offset the loss of Folston. The season's outcome will depend, however, on the sped-up development of their current stable of backs combined with a little ingenuity from Kelly.

Contact Brian Plamondon at bplamond@nd.edu

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

RECRUITING

Irish impress recruits over Texas weekend

By **GREG HADLEY**
Editor-in-Chief

Notre Dame did not add any commitments to the classes of 2016 or 2017 this past week, but all the same, the Irish recruiting team enjoyed a successful weekend.

While the No. 9 Irish dominated Texas in Notre Dame Stadium on Saturday, several high-profile recruits watched and left impressed, according to Andrew Ivins, an Irish recruiting analyst.

Notre Dame had the added recruiting advantage of playing at home for the opening weekend of the season, said Ivins, who covers Notre Dame recruiting for Rivals.com affiliate Blue and Gold Illustrated. While other top programs such as Alabama, Auburn, Michigan and Baylor either played at neutral sites or took to the road, the Irish hosted arguably the best group of recruits in the nation.

"This was one of the premier games on a college campus, and I think Notre Dame had one of the top groups of visitors out there," Ivins said. "Notre Dame capitalized on playing a premier opponent at home in week one and set the foundation for them to shore up the class year moving forward into the rest of the season."

Thus far, Notre Dame has 14 commitments for the class of 2016 but is still looking to add top-level talent, including the class's first five-star recruit, per Rivals ratings.

To that end, the Irish hosted two five-star prospects this past weekend: receiver Demetris Robertson on an official visit and linebacker Daelin Hayes on an unofficial trip.

Robertson is ranked as the seventh-best recruit in the nation by Rivals and was committed to Alabama last spring. Since then, however, he has reopened the process and had a good experience at Notre Dame this past weekend, Ivins said.

Former, current and future Irish players courted Robertson. Receivers Golden



Photo courtesy of Blue and Gold Illustrated, Rivals.com

Demetris Robertson is ranked as the No. 7 recruit in the nation by Rivals.com and visited Notre Dame this past weekend.

Tate, now with the Detroit Lions, and Will Fuller met with the Savannah, Georgia, native, and fellow recruit and offensive lineman Parker Boudreaux, who has already committed to Notre Dame, spent a good portion of the weekend with him.

Boudreaux, along with other commits, came for the Texas weekend with the expectation that he would help to recruit his peers, Ivins said, and Robertson posted a picture of himself with Boudreaux and other offensive linemen to Twitter.

Hayes is top three at his position, per Rivals, and is currently committed to USC. However, he and his mother came for the Texas game and received plenty of attention from the Irish staff and players.

"He's starting to waver a little bit more [on his commitment to USC]," Ivins said. "This was his first time he's been on campus in a while, so that was big for the staff to lure him here. That's a credit to Brian Kelly, who's been heavily involved in his recruitment. He and his mom met with Kelly before the game for about 20 minutes. ... His mom asked a lot of questions. His mom, she's going to be key to his recruitment."

"She asked Coach Kelly a lot about, 'How are you going to develop my son into a man?' and non-football related stuff like that. From all accounts that I heard, it went very, very well and productively, and I think it's setting the stage for

Notre Dame to potentially flip Daelin down the line."

Kelly and the Irish have had a recent run of success getting players to switch their commitments, flipping eight players in last year's class, including quarterback Brandon Wimbusch.

Two other top targets, Donte Vaughn and D.J. Morgan, entered the weekend as safe bets to commit to Notre Dame. Both reported positive experiences, Ivins said, but Vaughn has already said he will not officially announce his commitment until Oct. 12, his birthday.

On the other hand, some analysts thought Morgan, a safety, might make his decision official as soon as this weekend, but no such announcement came, though Ivins said the silence does not mean there is any change in the likelihood that Morgan will commit to Notre Dame.

While the Irish are in Charlottesville to face Virginia this weekend, recruiting will naturally slow, Ivins said. The mid-Atlantic area of Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C., has been a particular area of focus for Brian Kelly's staff in recent years, Ivins said, with senior running back C.J. Prosise, junior cornerback Devin Butler and sophomore offensive lineman Sam Mustipher all coming from the area.

In the current cycle, the Irish have a three-star commit from Virginia in Jalen Elliott, who is projected to be a defensive back on the collegiate level. Ivins said it is possible Kelly or someone from his staff will check in with Elliott while the Irish are in the area. Otherwise, Ivins said, the recruiting impact of the game will likely be negligible.

For more on Notre Dame recruiting, check out BlueAndGold.com. Email Andrew Owens at aowens@blueandgold.com and tell him The Observer sent you.

Contact Greg Hadley at ghadley@nd.edu



Photo courtesy of Blue and Gold Illustrated, Rivals.com

Daelin Hayes ranks as the No. 3 linebacker in the nation by Rivals.com and is currently committed to USC.

Follow us on Twitter.
@ObserverSports



CHANGE OF DIRECTION

By **MARY GREEN**
Assistant Managing Editor

It all started with a dunk.

When Irish head coach Brian Kelly was searching through his next crop of recruits in the high school class of 2012, he saw a feat of athleticism out of Woodberry Forest School in Virginia that had him eager to get C.J. Prosise in a Notre Dame uniform.

"I saw him dunking a basketball at his high school, and I saw this athlete, and I said, 'I don't know where he's going to play, but we've got to take him,'" Kelly said Tuesday. "He's just that good of an athlete. Loved his personality. Again, his makeup, great fit from a great school. We've just got to find a place for him to play."

Little did Prosise know back then — he admitted, in retrospect, he can't recall Kelly seeing him play basketball — but that dunk would have him leaving his home in Petersburg, Virginia, headed to Notre Dame for his freshman year as a safety.

Three years later, Prosise returns to Virginia with the Irish, but this time, he will line up in the backfield as the team's starting running back.

It's a chain of events Prosise said he couldn't have predicted when he first came to South Bend.

"You never know where you're going to be needed, and I've always just wanted to be here for my team, and I've wanted to do whatever I can to make my team be the best team in the country, so if that means I was at safety, line-backer, receiver, now running back, I'm just doing whatever I can to help the team," he said Wednesday.

His freshman year, Prosise practiced with the safeties wearing a No. 34 jersey, but he didn't see much of the playing field as the Irish made their trip to the BCS Championship Game. The next year led to a new position and a new number — lining up with the receivers as No. 20 — because, Kelly said, "he wasn't a big hitter."

With a steady confidence a little quieter than that of some of his teammates, Prosise begged to differ.

"I would say I slightly disagree," he said with a grin. "I

feel like I didn't get my chance to, you know, get in there and hit a little bit on defense, but all I'm saying is, I think that I'm a physical player, but we didn't really get to see it that much on defense, I guess."

It's not that Prosise wasn't a physical player as a safety, Kelly said. In fact, the head coach said that asset made the senior's transition across the line of scrimmage and then to the backfield a bit easier.

"He just plays the game fast and physical," Kelly said. "He doesn't think about it. So I just think that he's not afraid of contact. He's somebody that, whether he's running the ball or he's catching the ball, he's always played that fearless kind of game."

Prosise said he's always had the mentality that he wants to help the team win in any way possible, so he wasn't upset when he was moved after his freshman season, but it did take some adjusting.

"Moving [from defense to offense] at first is kind of like, you get a little skeptical because I'm not used to catching passes from a college quarterback, but once you kind of get into the groove and get used to it," he said. "... I don't know, I feel like I'd still be a good safety if I was still back there, but that's not how it worked out, but I'm happy where I'm at right now."

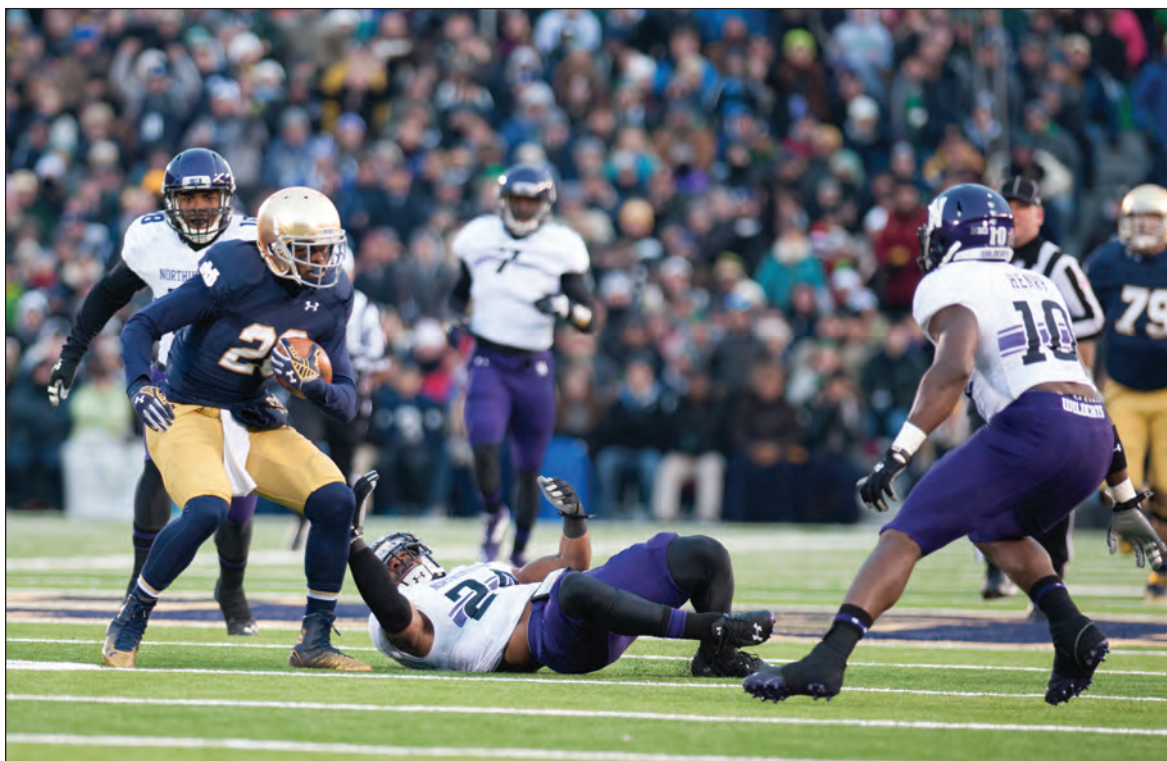
As a receiver his sophomore and junior years, he appeared in every game, making nine starts, and recorded 36 receptions for 588 yards — 516 of those in 2014 — and two touchdowns.

But last spring, his coaches told him he would be on the move again, this time to the running backs' room under first-year coach Autry Denson.

Kelly, Denson and his teammates praised the quickness and dexterity with which Prosise made the switch throughout the spring, and the new back showed those skills off at the team's Blue-Gold Game in April, collecting 64 yards on 12 carries, including a team-long 15-yard rush.

He continued that momentum into his second public appearance as a running back, but this time, it mattered a little more, in last week's season opener against Texas.

With starting junior running back Tarean Folston going



EMMET FARNAN | The Observer

Senior C.J. Prosise breaks a tackle during Notre Dame's 43-40 loss to Northwestern on Nov. 15 at Notre Dame Stadium. In that game, Prosise played receiver but has since transitioned to running back.

down in the first quarter with a torn ACL, Prosise had to step up and take the bulk of Notre Dame's carries. He showcased how naturally he seemed to have made the transition by tallying a game-high 98 yards on 20 rushes — a figure Kelly said he can maintain throughout the season.

However, Prosise admitted getting out of bed the next two mornings was more challenging than usual.

"I was sore, but you're going to be sore after a football game," he said. "That's just kind of how, kind of the life I chose, but I felt, for the most part, I felt good. I was hurting a little bit, but you've just got to move on, get in the ice tub, get treatment and get back on the field."

Teammates have different theories as to why Prosise was able to transition into the backfield without many visible growing pains. Last week, Folston attributed it to his nature as "a freak athlete," while graduate student cornerback Matthias Farley said Wednesday it was his combination of speed and size, at 6-foot-1/2 and 220 pounds.

"He doesn't really look that big," Farley said. "He walks around, he doesn't look that big, but when you see him in practice, you're like, you're a large individual."

"He's really, really shifty, which I don't think we got to see too much of when he was

at wide receiver because he runs around, catch the ball. But now you get the ball in his hands early and be able to make plays and make people miss. Obviously, he's incredibly fast."

Though he was officially named the starting running back earlier this week, ahead of true freshmen Josh Adams and Dexter Williams, Prosise still only has one actual game at the position under his belt. He said there's still more room for improvement, and he and his head coach agreed on where that needs to come.

"I think the fundamentals really of the position — stance, pocket for taking handoffs, the right steps," Kelly said. "I think really — why he's been able to move into the position that he is in is because of his physical ability, his maturity and understanding the offense. But it's certainly a work in progress as it related to the fundamentals."

"You're not seeing some of the things that I'm seeing fundamentally that need to continue to grow for him because they could end up hurting us down the road if we don't get better at them, and he knows that, too. So it's the work that we have to do every day in practice on the fundamentals of the position that are really central to his development."

The next time he takes the field, he will do so in front of more familiar faces than

usual — about 50, Prosise estimated, made up of family members and friends. Many of them will make the hour-and-a-half drive from Petersburg to Charlottesville to see the running back play in person for the first time in an Irish uniform.

"I'm going to be pumped up," he said. "I've actually been pumped up this whole week, so it's definitely going to be a great time."

However, he said he isn't naïve enough to expect a friendly crowd on the road against an ACC opponent, which happens to be the first school that offered him a scholarship in high school.

"I might be going home, and I might be playing in front of a lot of family, but it's still going to be at Scott Stadium, and I know they're gonna be rowdy and ready for us to come in there and play them," he said.

With his friends and family watching him play in the blue and gold for the first time, much less the first time as a running back, Prosise himself will still be enjoying the new feelings that come from this latest transition in his career.

"Oh, it's so much fun," he said. "When you just hear people talking and you just get going and then you see the O-line running in, hitting, I feel like there's nothing better in football to see."

Contact Mary Green at mgreen8@nd.edu



CHRIS COLLINS | The Observer



MICHAEL YU | The Observer

CAVALIERS PASSING

Junior Matt Johns steers a Cavaliers passing attack that lived on short throws against UCLA last weekend: Only two Virginia pass plays went for more than 20 yards all game. Senior receiver and team captain Canaan Severin will have his hands full with whoever matches up against him in the Notre Dame secondary, but he can expect a heavy dose of senior cornerback KeiVarae Russell after leading the Cavaliers in receptions, yards and touchdowns last season.

The Cavalier aerial attack against the Bruins was actually led by junior running back Taquan Mizzell out of the backfield. Mizzell hauled in eight catches for 100 yards and a touchdown, so Notre Dame will have to key on him out of the backfield.

Like Tyrone Swoopes last weekend, Johns has the ability to make plays with his feet if he doesn't have anything downfield. Junior linebacker Jaylon Smith handled Swoopes pretty well, though. Look for the Irish to keep him facing the quarterback when he drops into coverage.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

CAVALIERS RUSHING

Texas ran on the Irish defense 29 times last weekend for a grand total of 60 yards.

Virginia kept it on the ground 34 times against the Bruins and gained 90 yards.

Granted, Texas was basically one dimensional, so the Irish could key on the run. Johns and the air attack provide a little more of a threat Saturday, but this is still an offense reliant on the running game. Mizzell and fellow junior running back Albert Reid split the majority of the carries last week, but only Johns broke off a run longer than 10 yards.

Despite the loss of senior defensive lineman Jarron Jones, Notre Dame's defensive line more than held its own against Texas, and a deep and hungry linebacking corps waits behind them.

It's hard to see this one turning out well for the Cavalier offense.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

CAVALIERS OFFENSIVE COACHING

It's no secret Virginia coach Mike London finds himself on the hot seat. After an 8-5 season in 2011, London and the Cavaliers have won just 11 games in the past three

years. London has done a decent job of recruiting at Virginia, but the results on field haven't translated.

While last week's loss to the Bruins seemed lopsided, it would have been a lot closer, at least early on, if Virginia had been able to finish on a couple drives early in the game instead of settling for short field goals. If the Cavaliers are going to upset the Irish, London and his offensive staff have to find a way to punch it past Notre Dame defensive coordinator Brian VanGorder's defense.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

CAVALIERS SPECIAL TEAMS

Cavaliers senior kicker Ian Frye went a perfect 3-for-3 on field goals against the Bruins, connecting on attempts from 42, 39 and 19 yards out. Despite what that may say about the Cavaliers' inability to finish drives with touchdowns, Frye has proven himself a capable backup plan. His career field goal percentage stands at 79.5 (31-for-39), including an 81.5 percent (22-for-27) mark last year.

Junior punter Nicholas Conte saw his first collegiate action against UCLA and responded by averaging 50.5 yards on four punts. Notre Dame sophomore punter Tyler Newsome averaged only a little over 40 yards per boot against Texas.

Mizzell and Reid will handle the kickoff return duties for the Cavaliers, while Mizzell is slated to field the punt returns. Neither was particularly noteworthy against the Bruins, but that goes both ways: Neither broke a return, but neither coughed it up either.

Consistency, or at least a lack of inconsistency, pushes this one to the Cavaliers.

EDGE: VIRGINIA

CAVALIERS SCHEDULE (0-1)

- Sept. 5 @ UCLA (L 34-16)
- Sept. 12 Notre Dame
- Sept. 19 William & Mary
- Sept. 25 Boise State
- Oct. 10 @ Pittsburgh
- Oct. 17 Syracuse
- Oct. 24 @ North Carolina
- Oct. 31 Georgia Tech
- Nov. 7 @ Miami
- Nov. 14 @ Louisville
- Nov. 21 Duke
- Nov. 28 Virginia Tech

HEAD T

3:30 P.M.
SCOTT STADIUM

VIRGINIA



(Jr.) Keeon Johnson 85 WR

(Fr.) David Eldridge 82

(So.) Andre Levrone 14 WR

(Jr.) Kyle Dockins 17

(R-Fr.) Evan Butts 45 TE

(Sr.) Charlie Hopkins 86

(Jr.) Michael Mooney 76 LT

(So.) Jack English 67

(Jr.) Taquan Mizzell 4 RB

(Jr.) Albert Reid 5

(So.) Jack McDonald 71 LG

(Sr.) John Pond 60

(Jr.) Matt Johns 15 QB

(Jr.) Conner Brewer 2

(Jr.) Jackson Matteo 50 C

(Sr.) Ross Burbank 65

(Sr.) Ross Burbank 65 RG

(Jr.) Sean Karl 62

(Jr.) Eric Smith 72 RT

(Sr.) Jay Whitmire 77

(Sr.) Canaan Severin 9 WR

(Fr.) Olamide Zaccheaus 33

(Sr.) Maurice Canady 26 LCB

(Jr.) Tim Harris 5

(Fr.) C.J. Stalker 15 WLB

(So.) Malcolm Cook 27

(So.) Quin Blanding 3 S

(Jr.) Divante Walker 11

(Sr.) Kwontie Moore 34 DE

(Sr.) Trent Corney 43

(So.) Micah Kiser 53 MLB

(Fr.) Dominic Sheppard 30

(Sr.) David Dean 55 DT

(Jr.) Andre Miles-Redmond 56

(So.) Andrew Brown 9 DT

(Jr.) Donte Williams 93

(Jr.) Kelvin Rainey 38 S

(Jr.) Wilfred Wahee 28

(Sr.) Mike Moore 32 DE

(R-Fr.) Darrious Carter 6

(Jr.) Zach Bradshaw 51 SLB

(Jr.) Mark Hall 59

(Sr.) Demetrious Nicholson 1 RCB

(R-Fr.) Darious Latimore 39

(Sr.) Ian Frye 14 PK

(Jr.) Dylan Sims 91

(So.) Andrew Mackay 15 H

(Jr.) Nicholas Conte 18 P

(Jr.) James Coleman 32

(Jr.) Taquan Mizzell 4 KR

(Jr.) Albert Reid 5

(Jr.) Taquan Mizzell 4 PR

(So.) Tyler Shirley 42 LS



Greg Hadley
Editor-in-Chief



Mary Green
Assistant Managing Editor



Zach Klonsinski
Sports Editor

The strongest part of Virginia's defense is supposed to be its secondary, and UCLA's true freshman quarterback Josh Rosen torched the Cavaliers last week. Malik Zaire should have no problem doing the same, especially if he remains as accurate as he was against Texas.

With the loss of Tarean Folston, the run game is obviously an area of concern for the Irish, but under C.J. Prosise, it should be enough this week to set up the passing game.

Notre Dame's defense will clean up against Virginia, whose offense is only marginally more competent than Texas's. With the rust of injuries and layoffs busted, players like Joe Schmidt and Jarrett Grace will be all over the place. The Cavs won't make it into the red zone or onto the scoreboard until this game is well in hand for the Irish.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 35, Virginia 7

The Irish will take their first trip to the Commonwealth of Virginia this weekend, and they won't leave Charlottesville with a loss.

Malik Zaire may not be able to keep up the production and consistency he showcased against Texas last week, but he and his talented receiving corps shouldn't struggle too much this week against a Virginia defense that allowed over 350 passing yards to UCLA on Saturday, even with a defensive backs unit anchored by Quin Blanding.

There's no doubt Texas brought a struggling offense to South Bend last week, but credit also goes to the overall front-to-back strength of the Irish defense, which should have a similarly lockdown performance against a Cavaliers offense that generated just one score against the Bruins.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 37, Virginia 10

So I was sort of right about last week: The game wasn't that sloppy, there were big plays made (even Texas had one bomb to set up its only score of the game), and C.J. Prosise made a name for himself in the backfield, albeit for unforeseen reasons.

I just abominably underestimated Notre Dame's defense. Now that we have a sample size, though, expect more of the same against the Cavaliers this weekend: Prosise and Josh Adams following the big boys up front and opening up the play-action game for Zaire again. The Cavaliers' offense isn't quite the catastrophe of the Longhorns', but it's not exactly high-powered either.

My hesitation this time around is it's the season's first road test, but I owe the team a little more faith this week.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 38, Virginia 17

0 HEAD

ON ABC

NO. 9 NOTRE DAME



MICHAEL YU | The Observer



MICHAEL YU | The Observer



RCB **6** KeiVarae Russell (Sr.)
12 Devin Butler (Jr.)

WLB **9** Jaylon Smith (Jr.)
4 Te'von Coney (Fr.)

DE **45** Romeo Okwara (Sr.)
98 Andrew Trumbetti (So.)

DT **91** Sheldon Day (Sr.)
93 Jay Hayes (So.)

DT **75** Daniel Cage (So.)
99 Jerry Tillery (Fr.)

DE **90** Isaac Rochell (Jr.)
55 Jonathan Bonner (So.)

SLB **17** James Onwualu (Jr.)
48 Greer Martini (So.)

LCB **36** Cole Luke (Jr.)
24 Nick Coleman (Fr.)

WR **7** Will Fuller (Jr.)
86 Equanimeous St. Brown (Fr.)

TE **80** Durham Smythe (Jr.)
13 Tyler Luatua (So.)

RT **68** Mike McGlinchey (Jr.)
75 Mark Harrell (Sr.)

RG **79** Steve Elmer (Jr.)
62 Colin McGovern (Jr.)

C **72** Nick Martin (Gr.)
53 Sam Mustipher (So.)

LG **56** Quenton Nelson (So.)
71 Alex Bars (So.)

LT **78** Ronnie Stanley (Sr.)
70 Hunter Bivin (Jr.)

WR **2** Chris Brown (Sr.)
88 Corey Robinson (Jr.)

WR **3** Amir Carlisle (Gr.)
16 Torii Hunter Jr. (Jr.)

H **14** DeShone Kizer (So.)
4 Montgomery VanGorder (So.)

KR **3** Amir Carlisle (Gr.)
9 C.J. Sanders (Fr.)

LS **61** Scott Daly (Sr.)
99 Hunter Smith (Sr.)

PK **19** Justin Yoon (Fr.)
43 John Chereson (Jr.)

P **85** Tyler Newsome (So.)
42 Jeff Riney (Fr.)

PR **9** C.J. Sanders (Fr.)
7 Will Fuller (Jr.)



IRISH PASSING

Virginia's secondary, lead by preseason all-ACC sophomore safety Quin Blanding, was supposed to be the Cavalier defense's strongest area.

That didn't stop UCLA's true freshman quarterback Josh Rosen from completing 28 of his 35 pass attempts for 351 yards and three touchdowns.

Irish junior quarterback Malik Zaire found similar success against Texas, including a 66-yard bomb to junior wide receiver Will Fuller for a score in the third quarter. Zaire's Notre Dame Stadium debut (19-of-22, 313 yards and three scores) was helped out by a running game that steamrolled over the Longhorn defense. If the Irish rushing attack has a day anywhere near what it did against Texas, Zaire and the receiving corps should have no trouble finding making themselves at home in Charlottesville.

Even if it doesn't, Rosen and the Bruins proved this Cavalier secondary is still quite vulnerable. For a team as deep at receiver as Notre Dame, Zaire just needs to keep the ball in their hands, not Virginia's.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH RUSHING

The largest negative for Notre Dame last weekend was the season-ending injury to junior running back Tarean Folston in the first quarter. Besides that, though, there was little Notre Dame's running game couldn't do.

Senior running back C.J. Prosise tore up the Longhorn defense behind an inspired effort from the offensive line, and freshman running back Josh Adams made a flashy debut by scoring a touchdown on his first collegiate carry before adding another one later.

Texas's front seven was supposedly one of the best around despite the team's overall struggles. Virginia's isn't in that discussion. Even with Rosen throwing for over 350 yards, the Bruin running game combined for 152 yards on nearly 20 fewer carries than the Irish against the Longhorns.

The offensive line needs to clean up the penalties, but this one is still easy to call.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

Coaching gets easier when you thoroughly

dominate a team like Notre Dame did against Texas, and it should stay that way if the Irish play like they did last week.

With all the hype surrounding Virginia's secondary taking a blow from UCLA and Rosen, head coach Brian Kelly, offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mike Sanford and receivers/associate head coach Mike Denbrock just need to not get in their offense's way with the game plan. If the Irish establish the run game early like last week, even with the loss of junior running back Tarean Folston for the year due to a torn ACL, the play-action game should be wide open.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

Freshman kicker Justin Yoon looked solid enough in his first collegiate game, connecting on his first career collegiate field goal attempt from 38 yards out and drilling all five of his extra-point attempts.

There were a couple shaky snap-and-hold combinations on those Yoon kicks, especially on the first extra-point attempt. Sophomore quarterback DeShone Kizer almost dropped the ball but got it up in time to meet Yoon's foot, though it went largely unnoticed.

The Irish return game totaled nine yards combined between freshman receiver C.J. Sanders' muffed punt and graduate student receiver Amir Carlisle's near-knee debacle on a kickoff return.

Until the Irish special teams units get back to consistency, it's hard to put complete faith in them.

EDGE: VIRGINIA

IRISH SCHEDULE (1-0)

Sept. 5 **Texas (W 38-3)**
Sept. 12 **@ Virginia**
Sept. 19 **Georgia Tech**
Sept. 26 **Massachusetts**
Oct. 3 **@ Clemson**
Oct. 10 **Navy**
Oct. 17 **USC**
Oct. 31 **@ Temple**
Nov. 7 **@ Pittsburgh**
Nov. 14 **Wake Forest**
Nov. 21 **vs. Boston College**
Nov. 28 **@ Stanford**



Alex Carson
Associate Sports Editor



Brian Plamondon
Sports Writer

At the end of the day, there's probably not too much of a talent difference between Virginia and Texas — both are at a far inferior spot to Notre Dame at this point in time. Of course, going on the road is always more difficult than playing at home, but that's really the only thing that should give Irish fans cause for concern heading into this one.

UCLA true freshman quarterback Josh Rosen burned the Cavaliers defense for 351 yards and three scores last week, and I'm not sure Virginia will do a much better job against Malik Zaire and the Irish offense this week. Another strong defensive performance from Notre Dame should help see this game sealed up by the end of the third quarter.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 34, Virginia 10

In what may turn out to be a surprise to all who follow Notre Dame football, Virginia might end up being a superior opponent to Texas — but still not enough to make this a close game. The Cavaliers will be playing hard for hot-seat candidate Mike London, but the talent gap between the two teams is just too immense.

If UCLA's true freshman quarterback can pick apart a supposed above-average Virginia secondary, Malik Zaire should have no trouble replicating his Texas performance. Still, look for Notre Dame to run the ball early to see what it truly has at the position before Georgia Tech comes to town.

Notre Dame has never been a team to put up 50 points, but look for another convincing win nonetheless.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 34, Virginia 13

For in-game updates and stats from the press box Saturday, follow us on Twitter at @ObserverSports



Blanding, secondary lead Cavalier defense

By ALEX CARSON
Associate Sports Editor

When Cavaliers sophomore safety Quin Blanding was making his college decision, he had plenty of elite programs to choose from — the last two national champions recruited him, Florida State and Ohio State, and he had an offer on the table from Notre Dame.

The impressive offers were what you'd expect from a player considered by many rankings to have been the best safety in his class, but instead of heading to one of those programs, the Virginia Beach native stayed in state, making the move to Charlottesville and Mike London's Virginia program.

And as a true freshman with the Cavaliers, Blanding didn't disappoint. He led all freshmen nationally with 123 tackles and added three interceptions en route to ACC defensive rookie of the year and Freshman All-American honors.

This year, he was named to the preseason all-conference team, as well as being made a part of his squad's "leadership council."

Irish head coach Brian Kelly offered up his own praise of the defensive back ahead of the teams' clash at Scott Stadium on Saturday.

"Quin Blanding is an

outstanding player," Kelly said Tuesday. "I think he was one of the better players in the conference last year."

Blanding's ability to both jam the run at the line of scrimmage and drop back into pass coverage makes him an integral cog in the motor that is defensive coordinator Jon Tenuta's high-pressure scheme.

"[Tenuta] certainly is not a bend but don't break defensive coordinator," Kelly said. "He likes to be controlling tempo, and he's aggressive."

The Irish head coach later compared Tenuta, the Irish defensive coordinator in 2009, to current Notre Dame defensive coordinator Brian VanGorder,

"I think they both probably drink from the same well," he said. "... I think Brian and Jon would definitely both tell you they'd much rather be exotic and bring pressures if they could."

Saturday marks a chance for the Cavaliers to respond after a lackluster defensive performance last week in a 34-16 loss at No. 13 UCLA, when Bruins true freshman quarterback Josh Rosen threw for 351 yards and three touchdowns in his collegiate debut.

Virginia head coach Mike London said while his cornerbacks got beat deep in the season-opening loss, he



Photo courtesy of The Cavalier Daily

Sophomore safety Quin Blanding covers a Richmond receiver last season during the Cavaliers' 45-13 win at Scott Stadium. Blanding racked up 10 tackles last week during a 34-16 loss to UCLA.

wanted to see more pressure from his team against the No. 9 Irish on Saturday.

"You want to have a chance to affect the quarterback's ability to not just stand in the pocket and have all day to throw with rushers, with stunts, with schemes," London said. "... We could not get to [Rosen] and apply enough pressure to affect his throws.

"... Obviously, we have to do a better job in terms of the coverage standpoint, but it goes back to the pressure as

well, the pass-rush pressure."

And while it wasn't the greatest of games on the field for the Virginia defense against UCLA, Blanding carried on as his usual self, recording 10 tackles in the loss. If the sophomore merely keeps the pace he's set in the first 13 games of his career, he will break Jamie Sharper's school record for career tackles midway through his senior campaign.

But at the end of the day, it's a trying time for the Cavaliers program. While Blanding

turned down offers from bigger programs for the culture London creates, the Virginia head coach is likely on the hot seat in Charlottesville — since being hired in December 2009, London's squads have made just one bowl game and posted a 23-38 record. It's led many to speculate as to whether or not he will make it through the season if the Cavaliers get off to a slow start.

Contact Alex Carson at
acarson1@nd.edu



Photo courtesy of The Cavalier Daily

Cavaliers sophomore safety Quin Blanding reacts to a play during Virginia's 28-27 loss to North Carolina at Scott Stadium last season.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

WHERE THE GAME TAKES YOU

Your Notre Dame Federal Credit Union account is anything but local! With a wide range of deposit and withdrawal options, free services, great products, and low rate loans available nationwide, there's no reason to go anywhere else.

**CALL, GO ONLINE OR STOP IN TO OPEN AN ACCOUNT TODAY.
WHEREVER THE GAME TAKES YOU, WE'RE THERE.**

NotreDameFCU.com | 800/522-6611



NOTRE DAME
FEDERAL CREDIT UNION



Independent of the University

Defensive line looks to build on strong start



CHRIS COLLINS | The Observer

Irish junior defensive lineman Isaac Rochell (90) helps bring down Longhorn quarterback Tyrone Swoopes last Saturday during Notre Dame's 38-3 win over Texas at Notre Dame Stadium. Rochell, who contributed a sack as well, was part of a defensive line that held the Longhorns to 60 total rushing yards.

By **ZACH KLONSINSKI**
Sports Editor

The noise was nonstop this offseason and all throughout fall camp.

The Notre Dame defense was getting nearly everyone back after injuries decimated it last season, particularly at linebacker. The secondary was also going to benefit from the return of senior cornerback KeiVarae Russell when he was finally cleared by the NCAA.

The biggest news up front on the defensive line, however, was the loss of senior defensive lineman Jarron Jones, who went down for the year with an MCL tear. In his place, sophomore Daniel Cage and freshman Jerry Tillery found themselves responsible for filling the void. Then came the NCAA's denial of graduate student Ishaq Williams' petition for a fifth year of eligibility. Suddenly the Irish defensive line became the question mark on defense.

One game, three sacks and 60 total rushing yards later, the Irish defensive line has made its statement, according to senior defensive lineman

and team captain Sheldon Day.

"It was good seeing everything that we went through over the summer, spring ball and fall camp, the way [defensive line] coach [Keith] Gilmore has been on us about pass rush and how much we beat our work with the pass rush, and just to see it kind of come together and be successful at it," Day said Wednesday.

"That's part of our mindset: that we want to play with a little bit of an attitude," junior defensive lineman Isaac Rochell said. "I think it's a big deal and it results in a winning culture. [Defensive coordinator Brian] VanGorder stresses that all the time, and a lot of that stems from last year. When he called the defense soft, we changed our mentality. And in the first game, I think we did a good job. We were gang tackling, getting there, and that has a lot to do with attitude."

Day said Cage and Tillery, thrown into the front line, were particularly impressive in their debuts.

"They played out of their minds, just running around for the ball," Day said. "[Tillery's]

first time playing didn't look like a freshman at all, just watching him fly around, make plays, have fun, finally see some excitement with football. Definitely good to see him and Daniel play well, kept his gap and did everything we asked him to do."

Day, Cage, Tillery, Rochell, senior Romeo Okwara and sophomore Andrew Trumbetti combined for a dozen tackles on the day, including four tackles for loss and a sack apiece from Day, Cage and Okwara.

Day in particular wreaked havoc in the Longhorn backfield, earning four quarterback hurries on the stat sheet. All the same, Day said he was not pleased with his inability to finish plays off.

"I definitely left some sacks out on the table," Day said. "I'm all about evaluating myself with my finishing ability. So I would definitely say I didn't grade out that well personally."

"We left so many sacks on the field," Rochell said, agreeing with the captain. "We had a lot of quarterback pressures, but we want to get the

quarterback. It's cool to get quarterback pressures, but that's quarterback pressures, it's not a sack. It's something we talk about a lot.

"VanGorder uses the term 'almost guy,' and he harps on not being an 'almost guy.' ... We don't want to be 'almost guys,' we want to make plays and be on the ball."

Day said he communicates his personal quest for improvement to the entire defensive line.

"It's definitely easy to get complacent, but we haven't really [done] anything," Day said. "So we are always trying to do what we can to get better each and every day, especially in the D-Line room. So much room for improvement."

That ferocity and hunger separates this season's defensive line from last year's, Day said.

"[It's] just the way our culture is in the defensive room, just trying to make sure we have a dominating performance every time we step on the field," Day said.

Like Texas last week, Virginia will look to attack the Irish with a power-run game,

carried by a pair of junior running backs in Taquan Mizzell and Albert Reid.

"It's about dominating the offensive line, so we are definitely focusing on getting off, hands and footwork, and so we are definitely trying to make sure we work our technique this week," Day said.

UCLA held the Cavaliers' offense to just 98 yards on the ground, but Virginia junior signal-caller Matt Johns should provide a greater threat through the air than the Longhorns. Rochell said the Irish are looking forward to the challenge.

"The biggest thing with [Virginia] is attitude," Rochell said. "They approach the game with an intensity that we haven't seen, and that's a big deal, especially on the road. So I think it's going to start with us coming out in the first and second quarter and really getting after it."

The Irish and Cavaliers kick off from Scott Stadium at 3:30 p.m. Saturday in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Contact Zach Klonsinski at zklonsin@nd.edu



MICHAEL YU | The Observer

The Irish defensive line — junior Isaac Rochell (90), senior Sheldon Day (91), freshman Jerry Tillery (99) and sophomore Andrew Trumbetti (98) — looks to the sideline for a play call during Notre Dame's 38-3 win over Texas last Saturday at Notre Dame Stadium. The defensive line totaled three sacks and seven quarterback hurries against the Longhorns.

Travel the world with The Observer

Introducing the Observer Passport blog
abroad.ndsmcobserver.com

Rome
London
Dublin

Jordan
Toledo

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

Late Night Grill Out -- IRISHenanigans -- Improv Comedy -- Activities Night

Opening Mass & Picnic -- Movie on the Quad -- Hellogoodbye Concert -- Ice Cream Social

Late Night Study Break -- Best Of LaFortune -- Comedy on the Quad -- Food Truck Frenzie



f /saoND

@saoND

@sao_ND