

SCHOLASTIC

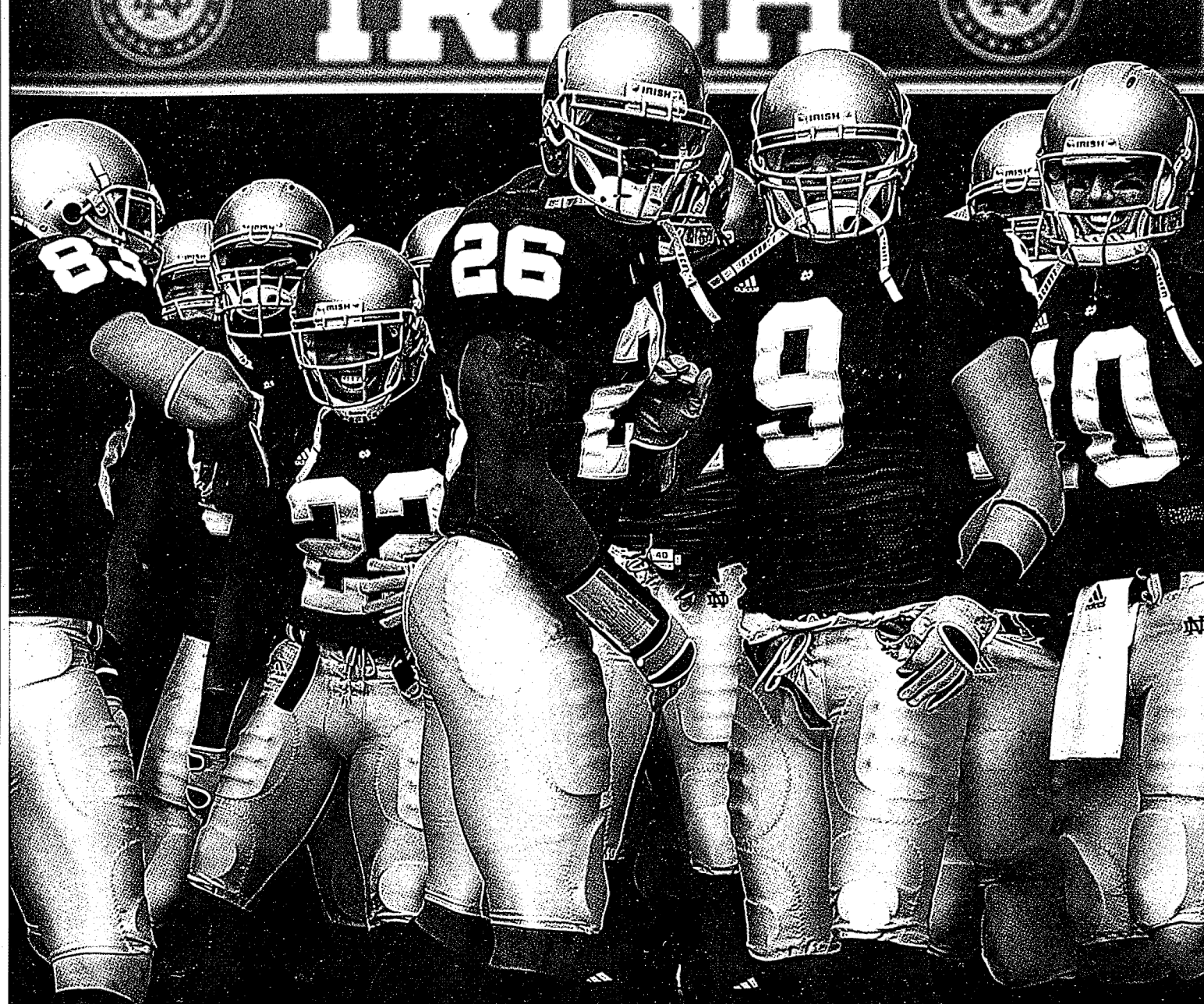
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FOOTBALL REVIEW

2006

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FROM THE EDITOR ...

Notre Dame was back. In 2005 Brady Quinn and new Head Coach Charlie Weis led the Irish to a 9-3 record that exceeded expectations. Preseason hype was sky high in anticipation of the 2006 season, especially after Weis declared that 9-3 wasn't good enough.

Questions about the defense's tendency to give up big plays, most notably the 617 yards of offense surrendered to Ohio State in the Fiesta Bowl, didn't drop the Irish in early polls: Notre Dame's No. 2 preseason ranking was the highest since 1990, when the Irish opened against No. 1 ranked Michigan. Instead the offense, led by Quinn, Jeff Samardzija and a healthy Rhema McKnight, was projected to carry the team to a national championship — and pick up a Heisman for Quinn along the way. After a turbulent three years, such a finish would be the perfect ending.

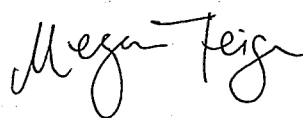
The 2006 season featured many memorable moments. Dramatic comeback wins against Michigan State and UCLA made these games instant classics. A new post-game tradition was started as the team joined their classmates to sing the alma mater, and a special senior class played its last home game wearing green jerseys. Quinn celebrated after the game by leading the student section in a "Beat SC!" chant as another chance at the championship game suddenly seemed possible, if remote. He later traveled to New York as the first Heisman finalist since Rocket Ismail finished second in 1990, and the Irish played in their second straight BCS bowl. But conspicuously absent from the final tally, for the second year in a row, were wins in the big games.

After a blow-out loss to No. 11 Michigan at home and then losses to No. 3 USC and No. 4 LSU to close out the season, even the most optimistic Notre Dame fans could no longer ignore the team's shortcomings on both sides of the ball. The same was true of the media. The journalists who were quick to minimize Irish faults early in the season became their biggest critics, and their change of attitude was reflected in the polls. Despite the preseason expectations and a second record-setting season from Quinn, it was obvious that the Irish were not ready to compete with the nation's best teams.

Weis made it clear after the Sugar Bowl loss to LSU that a 10-3 season was not what he had expected. "For me personally, it's disappointing," Weis said. "10-3 just means we played one more game." Next year, 10-3 may not look so bad. The departure of a very large senior class, as well as the loss of running back Darius Walker, will leave the Irish with many holes to fill. Several starters are returning for a fifth year, but much of the team, as well as new defensive coordinator Corwin Brown, will enter the season untested.

There is some hope for the future. After two years of lackluster recruiting under Tyrone Willingham, Weis has put together back-to-back top-10 recruiting classes, and this year's class is currently ranked first in the nation. Just as Quinn had to four seasons ago, an untested true freshman will most likely start at quarterback next year. Unlike Quinn, however, he will develop under Weis from the beginning. A national championship didn't happen during my time at Notre Dame, but it may happen by the end of some of yours. The Irish will struggle to replace the talent lost this season, but make no mistake: Notre Dame will be back.

Sincerely,



Megan Teigen
Football Review Editor

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SCHOLASTIC FOOTBALL REVIEW



COVER DESIGN
JULIE RUFFIN

COVER PHOTO
JUAN MULDOON

Football Review Editor
Megan Teigen

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David Powell

Executive Design Editors
Julie Ruffin
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Kate Dresser

Executive Copy Assistant
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Photo: Quinn Sander, Victoria
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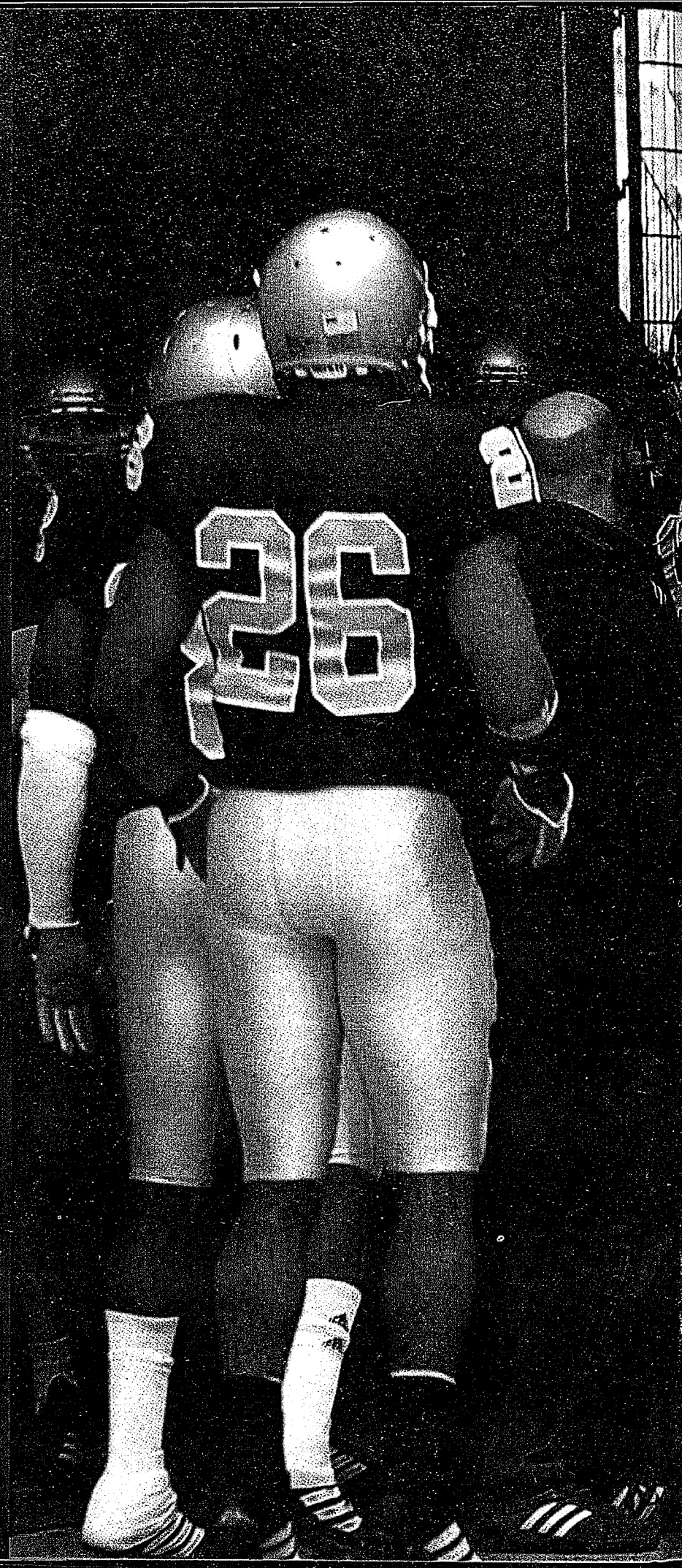
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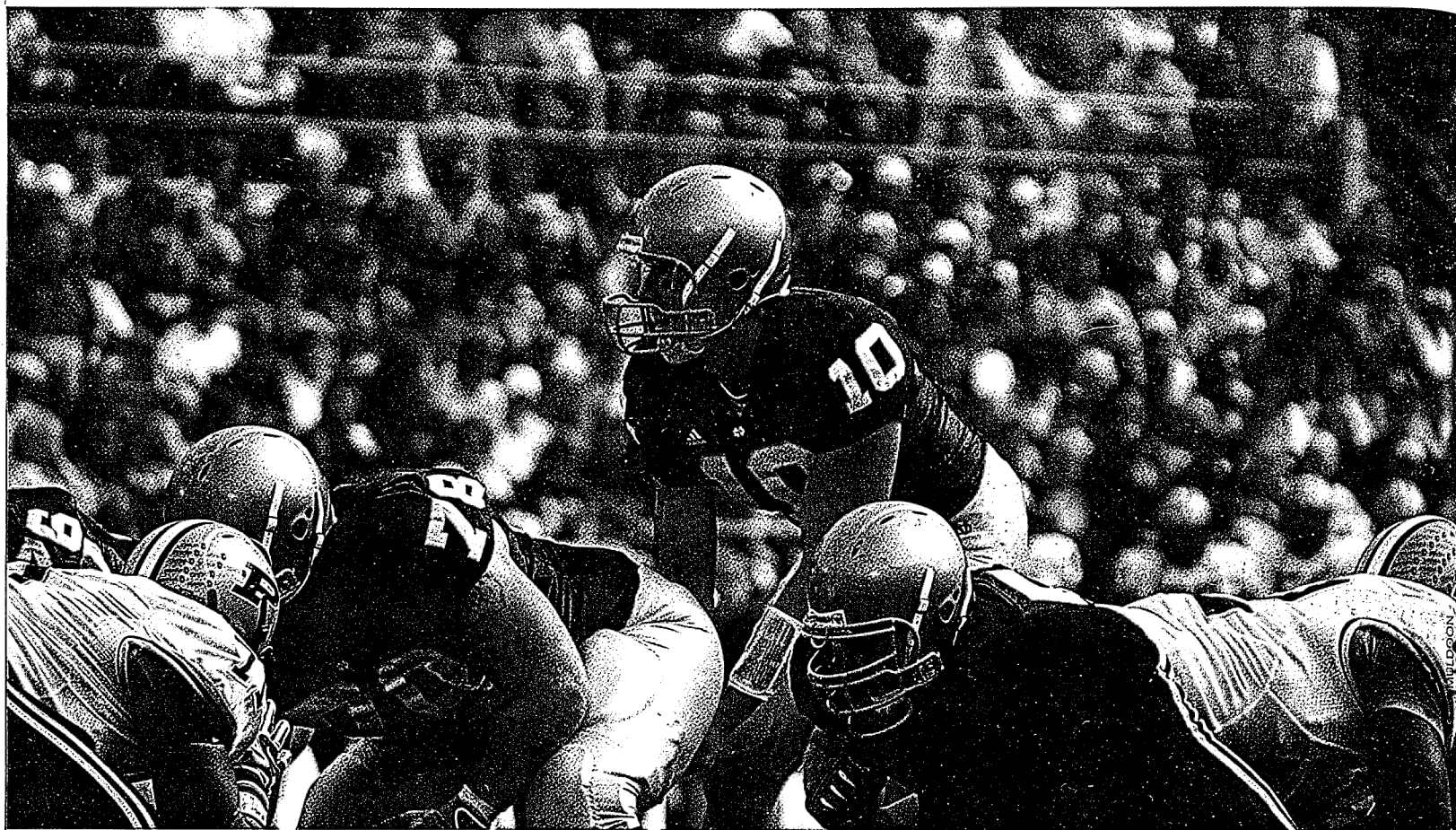
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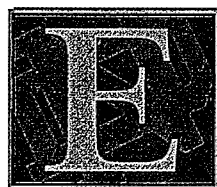






THE FACE OF THE FIGHTING IRISH As a four-year starter, Brady Quinn is arguably the most recognizable Notre Dame athlete of the decade.

Brady Quinn's Legacy



Megan Teigen

Every home game this season carried a special reminder for Brady Quinn of what was expected of him in his fourth and final season as quarterback of the Notre Dame Fighting Irish. A new NCAA rule standardized the 12-game season, adding one to the 11-game precedent in South Bend and giving Notre Dame seven home games for 2006.

Seven Notre Dame home games, seven past Heisman winners — conveniently coinciding with the senior season of the most prolific passer in Irish history. Past winners were brought in to speak at pep rallies and be recognized during the game. Legendary quarterbacks Angelo

Bertelli, John Lujack, Paul Hornung and John Huarte graced general admission tickets — an impressive line up that Quinn, after a record-shattering junior season, seemed destined to join.

Like the rest of this year's senior class, Quinn arrived at Notre Dame with high hopes after Tyrone Willingham coached the Irish to a 10-3 "Return to Glory" in his first season as head coach. Instead, he struggled through two disappointing seasons and endured an uncertain offseason after Willingham was fired and Charlie Weis was hired.

Quinn earned his first start against Purdue in just the fourth game of his freshman season, after seeing playing time in each of the season's first three games. Inconsistent performances by senior Carlyle Holiday prompted the switch, and Coach Willingham never

went back.

The Purdue game was a rough one for Quinn. He completed 29 of an astonishing 59 pass attempts for 297 yards and a touchdown, but was hit repeatedly and threw four interceptions. It was the same for much of Quinn's first two seasons. Notre Dame finished with a 5-7 record in 2003; Quinn was 4-5 in his 9 starts. In 2004, Quinn and the Irish finished a disappointing 6-6. Following a 3-1 start that included an upset of No. 8 Michigan, the season ended with three straight losses, including a 38-21 defeat by Oregon State in the Insight Bowl after Willingham's firing had been announced.

"When you're hitting lows like that halfway through your college career," Quinn said, reflecting on the situation's uncertainty, "and you're not having the type of career you thought you would

have, and then you have a coaching change, you don't know where you're going to end up."

But just one year later, it suddenly looked as if Quinn would end up on top. Under Weis' instruction, Quinn developed from a 50-percent passer into the top Heisman candidate and arguably the best passer in Notre Dame history.

After the Sugar Bowl loss to LSU, an emotional Quinn struggled to maintain his composure as he explained to reporters what his time at Notre Dame meant to him. "Notre Dame's been a great place for me," Quinn said at the post-game press conference. "I've grown to love it. The people here are the best — I can't forget these guys."

And Notre Dame won't easily forget Quinn. Not only does he own 36 school passing records, from most career touchdown passes (95) to career passing yards (11,614), but no other quarterback in Fighting Irish history comes close. Quinn's 95 career touchdown passes, for example, almost double the previous record of 52, set by Ron Powlus from 1994-97. His 226 consecutive passes without an interception this season broke his own 2005 record of 130.

After an 11-13 record in his first two seasons, Quinn led the Irish to a combined 19-6 record over his last two, with four losses to teams ranked in the top five. In the 2005-2006 seasons, Quinn completed 64 percent of his passes for 7,197 yards, throwing 67 touchdowns and only 12 interceptions. With performances reminiscent of quarterback Joe Montana's 1979 "Chicken Soup" comeback in the Cotton Bowl, Quinn orchestrated dramatic come-from-behind victories against Michigan State and UCLA in 2006. He coolly led his offense on an 87-yard touchdown drive to take the lead — and nearly the upset — over USC in 2005. This season, Quinn was named the Maxwell Award College Football Player of the year as well as the Cingular All-America Player of the Year, the only major award determined by fans. He received the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award and was a Heisman Trophy finalist after a fourth-place finish in 2005.

Beyond the numbers and awards, however, Quinn gave something more to

Notre Dame. As a four-year starter and two-year captain, he was the face of the Irish team that, after years of mediocrity under former head coaches Bob Davie and Willingham, finally returned to the national spotlight. Before the 2006 season, he graced the covers of *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN Magazine*, among others — and the walls of many girls' dorm rooms. As autograph requests piled up outside his own dorm room and the expectations of fans across the country grew exponentially, Quinn consistently handled the attention and pressure with class. After Notre Dame's last-minute comeback against UCLA, a reporter asked offensive guard Bob Morton, "How cool was Brady on that final drive?" Morton's only response was, "How cool is Brady always?"

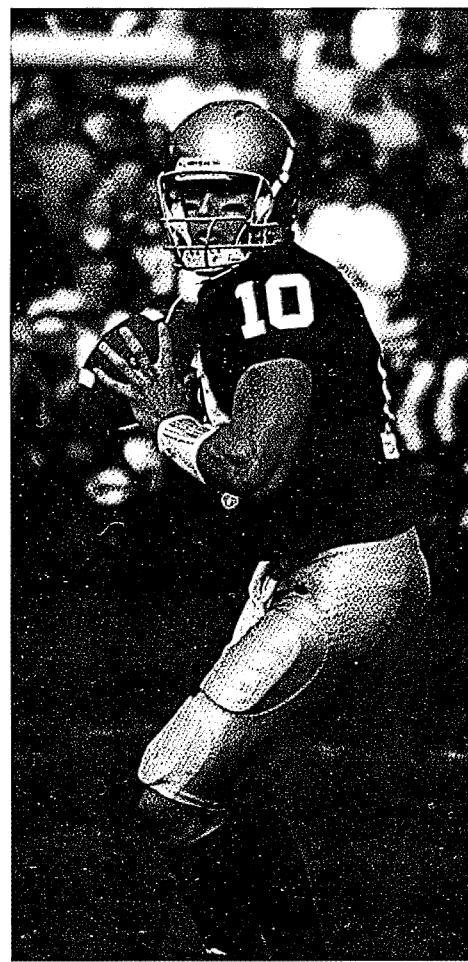
But will everything Quinn has done be overshadowed by the things he could not do? Quinn never won a game against USC, and he extended Notre Dame's bowl losing streak to nine with losses to Oregon State, Ohio State and LSU. He "lost" the Heisman after throwing three interceptions in the worst Irish home loss since 1960, and was criticized for failing to perform in big games.

Asked after the 2006 Army game how the senior class would be remembered, Weis told reporters their legacy had yet to be defined. "You're always remembered by how it ended," Weis said. Unfortunately for Quinn, his career ended with disappointing losses to USC and LSU. But Quinn has done too much over the past four years for the losses to overshadow his successes. "I can't imagine any player in this country being more important to his team than Brady Quinn is to ours," Weis said before the Army game. "Maybe that exists. I just can't imagine it."

Looking toward the end of his college career, Quinn reflected on how he would like to be remembered. "Hopefully, what I've done over the last four years, and really what happens in the next game, I'd like to be remembered as the quarterback who helped Notre Dame go from a time when we weren't doing so well and helped turn the program around," he said. "At this point, that's all you can hope for and all you can do." He has done just that, and his achievements on and off the field

will continue to strengthen the program even after he moves on to the next level. Top quarterback recruit Jimmy Clausen is already being heralded as the next leader of Notre Dame's return to prominence, and you can bet that he wouldn't be here if not for Quinn's success under Weis. Clausen may have a promising career ahead of him, but his way was paved by Quinn. The groundwork for future success was laid over the last two years; it is now up to the recruits he helped attract to continue what Quinn started and, in doing so, help cement his legacy.

As Quinn prepares for the NFL draft, he has another impressive line up of quarterbacks whose legacies he can aspire to. Thanks to Weis' pro experience, Quinn spent time last summer speaking with NFL legends Brett Favre, Peyton Manning and former Weis protege Tom Brady, each of whom gave Quinn advice on handling the spotlight and succeeding in the pros. And, if he can continue to transform teams like he did at Notre Dame, Quinn could cement his legacy at the next level, too. **6**





SCRAMBLING MAN Irish quarterback Brady Quinn ran his way into the endzone for Notre Dame's first touchdown of the season.

A Nailbiting Opener

Notre Dame 14 Georgia Tech 10

September 2, 2006, marked the end of eight months of Irish football fans' eager anticipation of Charlie Weis' sophomore season as Notre Dame's head coach. Coming off a 9-3 season in 2005 that reinvigorated Irish fans across the country, including a "Game of the Century" in which No. 9 Notre Dame was seconds away from upsetting No. 1 USC, Irish fans' high expectations for the 2006 season included phrases like "Heisman Trophy" and "National Championship."

The Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets used that hype as motivation, and when the No. 2 ranked Irish team and thousands



WHAT'S THE BUZZ? Yellow Jacket fans came out in swarms to cheer on an impressive Georgia Tech team.

of their fans headed down to Atlanta for the season opener, they found themselves in a game much closer than most had expected. The Irish ended up

on top with a 14-10 victory over the Yellow Jackets, but the match-up showed that Notre Dame would have to make use of both its running and passing game in order to hold on to a top ranking.

While fans and critics alike expected quarterback and captain Brady Quinn to start off another record-breaking season of touchdown throws and passing yards, the Irish were held scoreless in the first quarter. In fact, after a missed field goal attempt by senior kicker Carl Gioia, Notre Dame didn't put any points on the board until Quinn scrambled into the endzone with 11

Bobby Dodd Stadium

Attendance: 56,680

All-Time Series: 27-5-1

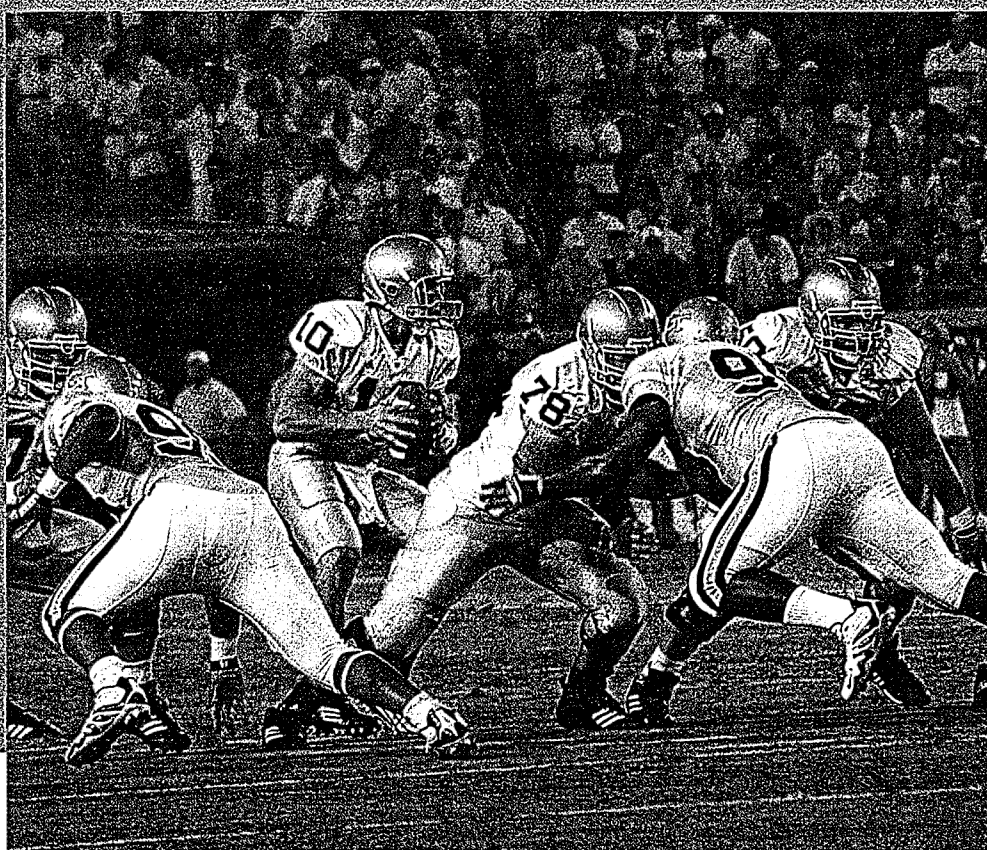
	1	2	3	4	FINAL
ND	0	7	7	0	14
GT	7	3	0	0	10

KEY STATS**ND****GT**

First Downs	21	14
Total Offensive Yards	384	259
Red Zone Scores-Chances	2-3	2-2
Possession Time	35:25	24:35
Penalties-Number-Yards	11-80	5-28

KEY PERFORMANCES:

Darius Walker: 22 Carries, 99 Yards, 1 TD
 Brady Quinn: 23-38, 246 Yards, 1 Rushing TD
 Rhema McKnight: 8 Receptions, 108 Yards
 Geoff Price: 5 punts, Average 50.4 Yards,
 Long 61 Yards



UNDER PRESSURE The Georgia Tech defense frustrated Brady Quinn's offense all night, holding the Irish to only 14 points.

seconds remaining in the first half.

In the meantime the Yellow Jackets, led by junior wide receiver Calvin Johnson, had put 10 points on the board with Johnson's first-quarter touchdown and Travis Bell's 30-yard field goal in the second quarter. The Irish came out better prepared on defense in the second half, holding Johnson to only two catches for 16 yards. This defensive performance allowed a third-quarter touchdown from junior running back Darius Walker, a Georgia native, to stand as the winning score. Here, the Irish benefited from a Georgia Tech personal foul that set them up at first and goal. Walker took the handoff from Quinn and with it, the win. Quinn finished the game 23-of-38 for 246 yards and, though he was sacked twice, threw no interceptions.

Despite the close score, the Irish did show signs of strength that promised to keep them in step for another winning season. Notre Dame fans were excited to welcome back senior wide receiver Rhema McKnight who was injured in the 2005 Michigan game. McKnight had a triumphant return, catching eight passes for 108 yards. The game also marked a change of position for senior captain Travis Thomas, whom Weis moved from running back to linebacker prior to the start of the season. Walker was also a top performer with 99 yards on the ground in addition to his touchdown run. And though Geoff Price was a less familiar name during the 2005 season, his standout performance against the Yellow Jackets ensured that every Irish fan would soon know who he was. Price punted five

FROM THE PRESS BOX

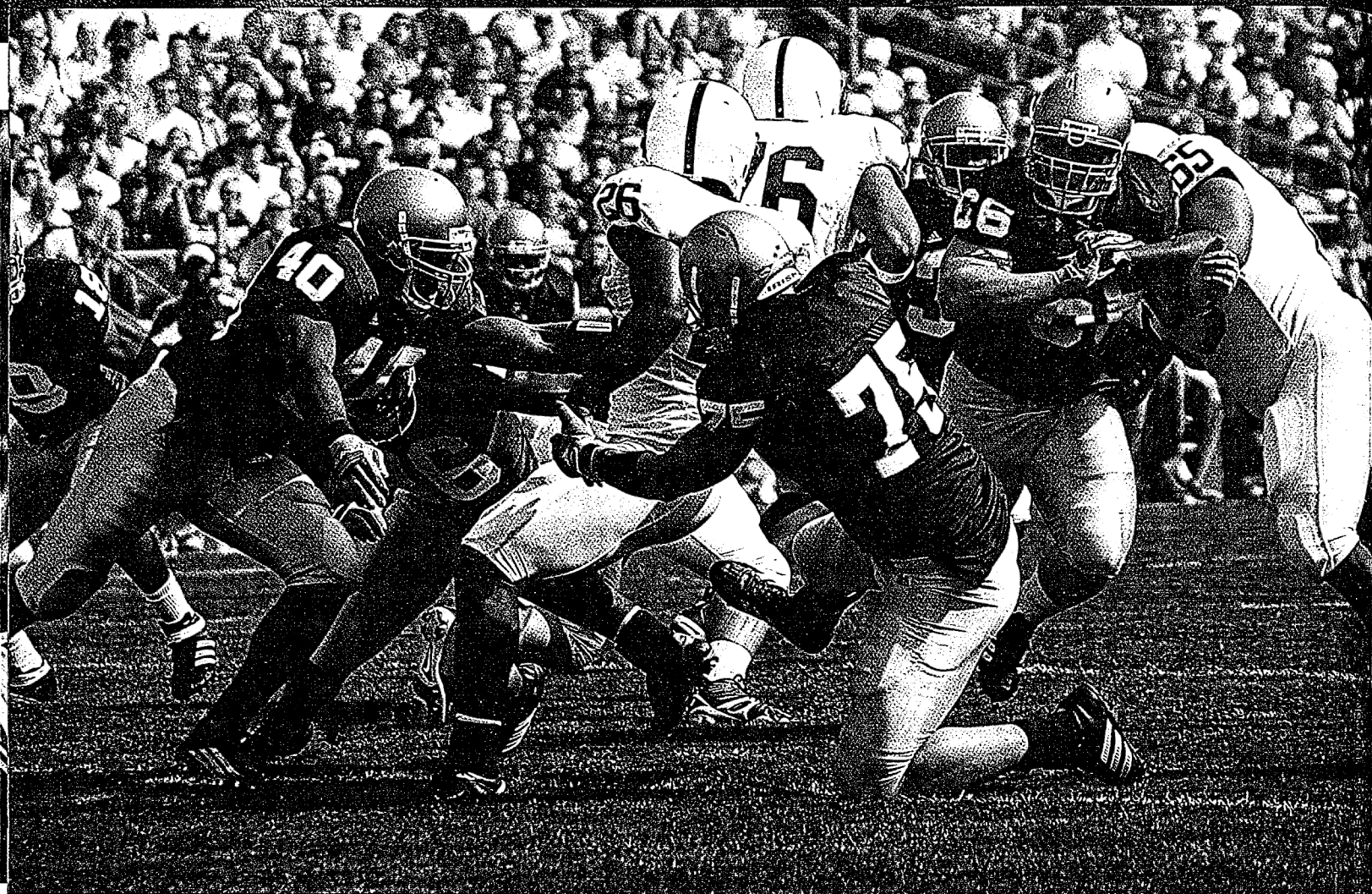


Nine Notre Dame freshmen saw their first collegiate playing time in the season opener. Sergio Brown, Jashaad Gaines, Richard Jackson,

Raeshon McNeil, Munir Prince, Morrice Richardson, Darrin Walls, George West and Sam Young. Right tackle Sam Young became the first freshman offensive lineman to start a season opener for the Irish since freshmen became eligible in 1972.

The opener also marked the return of Rhema McKnight, who sat out much of the 2005 season after injuring his knee against Michigan. He had a big performance, posting his fourth career game with at least 100 yards receiving. On the defensive side of the ball, Travis Thomas debuted at linebacker after a preseason switch from running back.

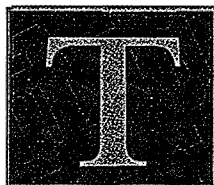
times with a 50.4 yard average. Senior tight end John Carlson also stepped up to fill the gap left by Anthony Fasano's departure to the NFL. Carlson had four receptions for 36 yards and promised to play an integral role in the Irish offense. Above all, Notre Dame's composure in recovering from a 10-point deficit gave Irish fans confidence in their team's ability to come back, something that would prove key in later games against Michigan State and UCLA.



GOING NOWHERE A pack of Irish defenders stop Penn State tailback Tony Hung (26) in his tracks.

Home Sweet Home

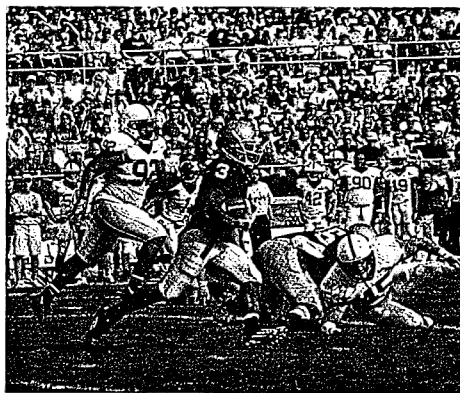
Notre Dame 41 Penn State 17



Karl O'Connor

he much anticipated home opener for the Fighting Irish took place in front of a sold-out Notre Dame Stadium on September 9. The Irish had not played a formidable Penn State squad since the Nittany Lions joined the Big Ten conference in 1993. After Penn State won the conference title in 2005, many anticipated a very competitive match-up between the two teams. Despite the hype surrounding both teams coming into the game, the No. 4 Irish took a 20-point lead in the first half and had no difficulty securing a solid 41-17 victory over Joe Paterno's No. 19 Nittany Lions.

The Irish went up 3-0 on their first



RUNNING WILD Darius Walker darts to the outside as he runs through the Penn State defense.

drive of the game but were quiet for the remainder of the first quarter. They started the second quarter much like the first with another field goal. Senior safety Tom Zbikowski forced a fumble on

Penn State's next drive, and a 7-yard pass to senior wide receiver Jeff Samardzija made the score 13-0. Notre Dame added another touchdown on a 9-yard pass to senior wide receiver Rhema McKnight with seven seconds left in the half.

While the 20-0 halftime score gave the players confidence, Head Coach Charlie Weis was not as comfortable. "It's different when it's 20-0 because three touchdowns, you still lose," Weis said. "When it's 27, your mentality as a play caller changes. As you know, I'm never one to try to score a hundred [...] My deal is to win the football game and win it the right way."

One minute into the third quarter, the Irish lead reached that 27-point mark. Zbikowski forced a fumble, then picked the ball up and ran 25 yards for

Notre Dame Stadium

Attendance: 80,795

All-Time Series: 9-8-1

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
PSU	0	0	3	14	17
ND	3	17	14	7	41

KEY STATS

	PSU	ND
Total Offensive Yards	383	397
First Downs	25	22
Third-Down Conversions	5/13	5/14
Red-Zone Scores-Chances	3-4	6-6
Fumble Returns-Yards-TDs	0-0-0	1-25-1

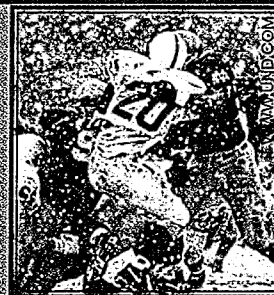
KEY PERFORMANCES:

Brady Quinn: 25-36, 287 Yards, 3 TDs
 John Carlson: 6 Receptions, 98 Yards
 Tom Zbikowski: 1 Fumble Recovery,
 25-Yard Return, 1 TD
 Maurice Crum: 14 Tackles



DOUBLE THREAT Playing this year at both linebacker and running back, captain Travis Thomas broke free for a 43-yard run, as well as a touchdown, against Penn State.

FROM THE PRESS BOX



This year's highly anticipated meeting between the Irish and the Penn State Nittany Lions resumed the series between the two programs. The last time the Fighting Irish met the Nittany Lions was the historic "Snow Bowl" which occurred on Nov. 14, 1992, at Notre Dame Stadium. During the "Snow Bowl," Notre Dame quarterback Rick Mirer engineered a game-winning drive in the final minute of the game that resulted in a 17-16 Notre Dame victory. The Irish victory over the Nittany Lions also broke a stalemate in the all-time series, which was deadlocked at 8-8-1 entering the game. Notre Dame now leads the series with a record of 9-8-1, which will continue next year when the Irish play Penn State in Happy Valley.

the score. Penn State responded with a field goal, but the game was out of reach for the Nittany Lions. Performances by Zbikowski and Notre Dame's other senior leaders allowed Notre Dame to win the "right way." Then a Heisman front-runner, Quinn's performance against Penn State only strengthened the argument for his place among the nation's best quarterbacks.

Quinn completed 25-of-36 for 287 yards, including three touchdowns to senior receivers Samardzija and McKnight and one to junior running back Darius Walker. Senior kicker Carl Gioia, who had struggled in the previous week against Georgia Tech, opened the game with two successful 35-yard field goals. Adding to the excitement, Travis Thomas' 43-yard run on a fake punt set

up a touchdown late in the third quarter. Thomas' ensuing 1-yard touchdown run brought the Irish lead over Penn State to 34-3.

Paterno complimented Quinn after the game, saying, "I thought Brady Quinn was a heck of a football player coming in, and he didn't do anything to change my mind."

The Nittany Lions struggled in their first away game of the season, following a thumping of Akron in their home opener. "I think they outplayed us," Paterno said. "We made too many mistakes. We were sloppy."

Penn State quarterback Anthony Morelli was no match for the Irish defense as he struggled to complete passes in only the second game of his career, passing for 21-of-33 with only 189 yards including

one interception and the aforementioned fumble. But Morelli was just one of several inexperienced players on the field for Penn State.

Paterno believed that playing an established team like Notre Dame would be a positive experience for his team, saying, "You know, I went out in this thing with the idea that this would be a good experience for the young guys. Regardless of what the outcome would be, I think we'd be a better football team for it. Obviously, I hoped we would play better than we played."

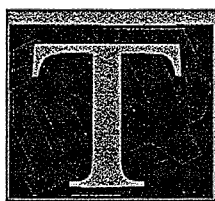
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CONFUSION ABOUNDS Notre Dame wide receiver David Grimes (11) searches for wiggle room against a stingy Wolverine defense.

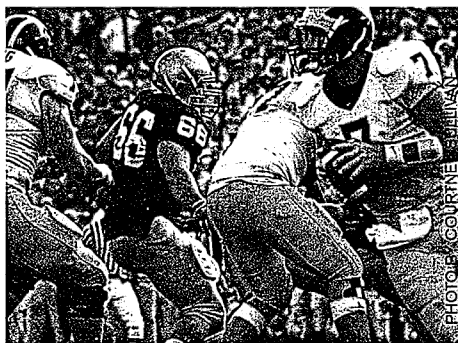
History Repeated

Michigan 47 Notre Dame 21



Christopher Meskill

he history between Notre Dame and Michigan isn't pretty. The Wolverines are credited with having brought football to South Bend in 1887, but Notre Dame had no success in the first few contests between the two — that is, until 1909. On November 6, 1909, first-year Head Coach Frank Longman led Notre Dame to an eight-point victory over Michigan, and from that day, Michigan Head Coach and Athletic Director Fielding Yost started a campaign to stop the Notre Dame program before it overtook Michigan's title as "The Champions of the West." Yost refused to schedule another match



POISED AND CONFIDENT Chad Henne (7), who has traditionally been rattled in big games, came through with three passing touchdowns against Notre Dame.

against Notre Dame and convinced other Big Ten conference members to do the same. On that day, a rivalry was born that still curdles the blood in the veins of students, alumni and fans alike.

Continuing the bitter rivalry, the

Wolverines salivated at the chance to smother the Fighting Irish in 2006. With the memory of last season's upset still fresh in Ann Arbor, Michigan wasted no time pouncing on Notre Dame, intercepting Brady Quinn on the second play of the game for a Wolverine touchdown. By the time the Irish headed into the locker room for halftime, they faced a nearly insurmountable 20-point deficit, and just like that, the chance of a Notre Dame national championship vanished. When the dust finally settled, no one needed to check the scoreboard to know the 47-21 outcome; it was written on the faces of the students struggling to sing the alma mater, much like the Michigan crowd's reaction a year earlier.

The game started tumultuously for Notre Dame, with the aforementioned

Notre Dame Stadium

Attendance: 80,795

All-time series: 14-19-1

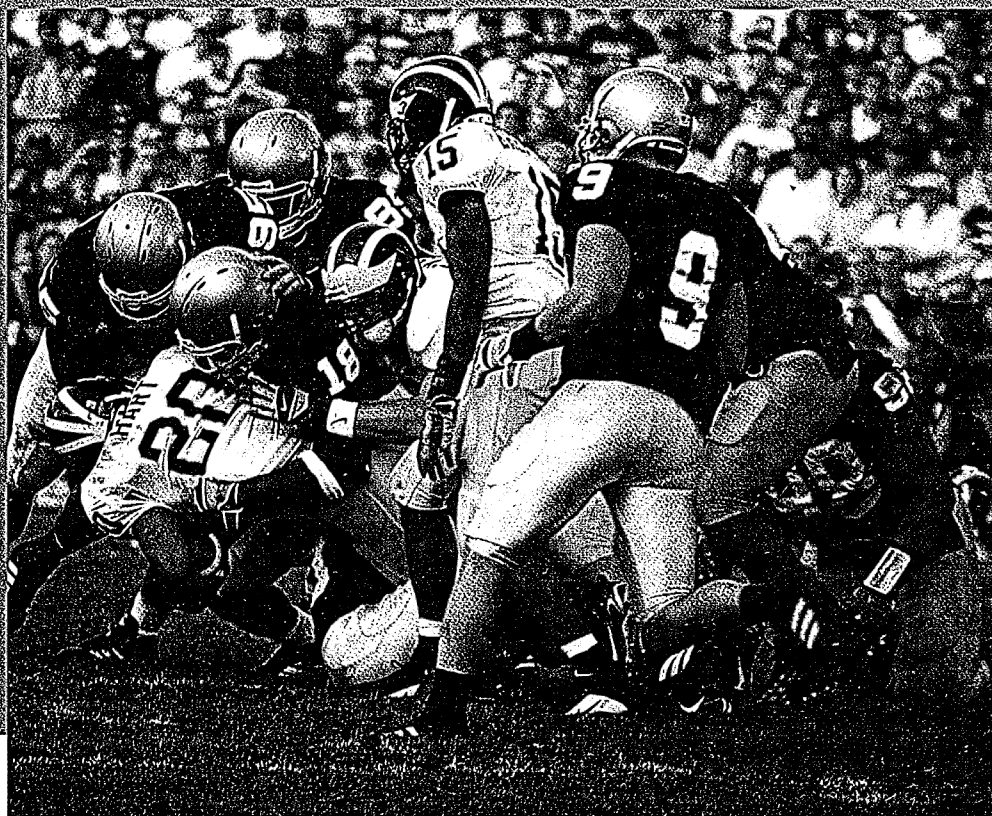
	1	2	3	4	FINAL
MICH	20	14	6	7	47
ND	7	7	0	7	21

KEY STATS

	MICH	ND
Total Offensive Yards	340	245
Net Rushing Yards	120	4
Fumbles: Number-Lost	0-0	2-2
Red Zone Scores-Chances	4-4	2-2
Possession Time	33:56	26:04

KEY PERFORMANCES:

Brady Quinn: 24-48, 234 Yards, 3 INTs, 3 TDs
 Rhema McKnight: 5 Receptions, 76 yards
 Chinedum Ndukwe: 11 Tackles, 1 INT



HART AND SOUL Michigan running back Mike Hart (20) battled for 124 yards and a touchdown against the Irish, who injured him in last year's match.

interception by Preston Burgess for a touchdown. However, Notre Dame showed some life early, as Chinedum Ndukwe picked off Wolverine quarterback Chad Henne, setting up a short touchdown run for Ashley McConnell, which tied the score at seven. Unfortunately, this would be the last glimmer of hope for the Irish.

After a trade-off of unsuccessful drives, Michigan found a mismatch in the Notre Dame secondary. Wolverine wide receiver Mario Manningham made his presence known, catching a 69-yard touchdown pass from Henne to put Michigan up by six. On the ensuing kick off, Notre Dame returner David Grimes fumbled the football, giving Michigan excellent field position at the Irish 27-yard line. Michigan halfback Mike Hart, injured in

last season's contest with Notre Dame, punched the ball into the endzone after three consecutive carries.

Michigan stifled the Notre Dame offense, forcing another punt by Geoff Price to start the second quarter. Henne handed off to Hart to gain some short yardage before hitting his long-range receiver, Manningham, for another touchdown, making it 27-7. Ten scoreless minutes later, Henne would find Manningham in the endzone again, capping a 10-play, 59-yard drive. While Quinn responded with seven consecutive completions, including a touchdown pass to receiver Jeff Samardzija, it was too little, too late; Notre Dame was down 34-14 at the half with no improvement forthcoming in the second half.

Quinn finished the day 24-of-48 with

three interceptions, clearing the way for eventual Heisman winner Troy Smith of Ohio State in the race for college football's coveted award. The 47-21 loss was the second worst home loss the Irish have suffered, having only given up more points to Purdue in 1960. While Quinn struggled in the game, he was not alone. The Irish rushing attack yielded only four yards, as opposed to Michigan's 120.

Head Coach Charlie Weis was quick to give credit where credit was due, saying, "We can all sit there and talk about Notre Dame football [...] But I think it's really only right to give just due to your opponent who just kicked your butt."

A 47-21 loss to an archrival is appropriately a "butt kicking" — but that seems to be the nature of this storied rivalry. **6**

FROM THE PRESS BOX



Following the 1909 snub by Michigan, the Fighting Irish had to search elsewhere for new adversaries. Ironically, Michigan spurred the creation of

Notre Dame's primary rivalry with USC, as Knute Rockne declared that he would travel across the country to find suitable opponents.

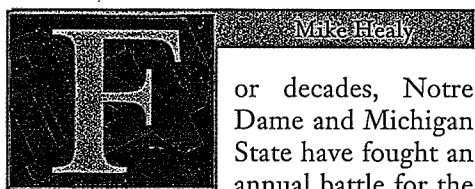
Also out of the blackballing by the Wolverines came the annual contest with Michigan State, as well as the first match between Notre Dame and Army. Notre Dame's series with Michigan resumed in 1978 under Irish Head Coach Dan Devine.



SLIPPERY WHEN WET Despite falling behind on the rain-soaked fields of Spartan Stadium, Darius Walker and the Irish offense managed to engineer an epic fourth quarter comeback.

Blame It on the Rain

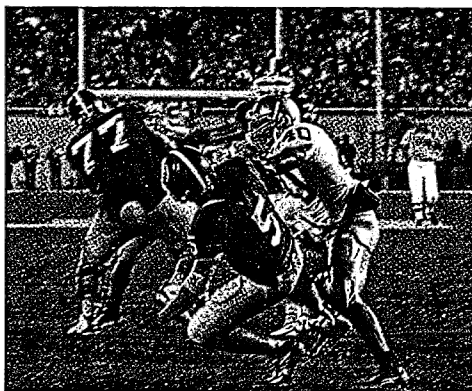
Notre Dame 40 Michigan State 37



Mike Healy

For decades, Notre Dame and Michigan State have fought an annual battle for the Megaphone, an obscure trophy dating back to when Michigan State opted to play Notre Dame in Michigan's absence. During the broadcast of the September 23 contest between the two schools, ABC analyst and former Irish Head Coach Bob Davie said, "You know, I didn't even know there was a Megaphone Trophy [...] but then again, I never beat Michigan State."

To Notre Dame fans, it looked frighteningly like Charlie Weis might end up matching Davie's ignominious feat, as the traveling Irish spent the first



HOT AND COLD Spartan quarterback Drew Stanton is known for his inconsistent performances on the field.

half trailing the Spartans on a wet and windy East Lansing night. Notre Dame looked lost, leaderless and ready to take a very long bus ride back to South Bend, where only a week before they

had been manhandled by the Michigan Wolverines 47-21.

Coming out of the gate, Notre Dame looked like it was still in a stupor from the previous week's defeat. The Irish offense was unable to get anything going, while Michigan State blitzed its way onto the scoreboard with a 34-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Drew Stanton to wide receiver Kerry Reed. The Spartans followed this with another touchdown — a 26-yard trick play pass from wide receiver Matt Trannon to running back Javon Ringer on the heels of a fumbled punt return by Irish captain Tom Zbikowski. A 32-yard field goal by kicker Brett Swenson made the score 17-0 Spartans as the first quarter expired.

The Irish struggled to stay in the game during the second and third quarters,

Spartan Stadium

Attendance: 80,193

All-Time Series: 44-25-1

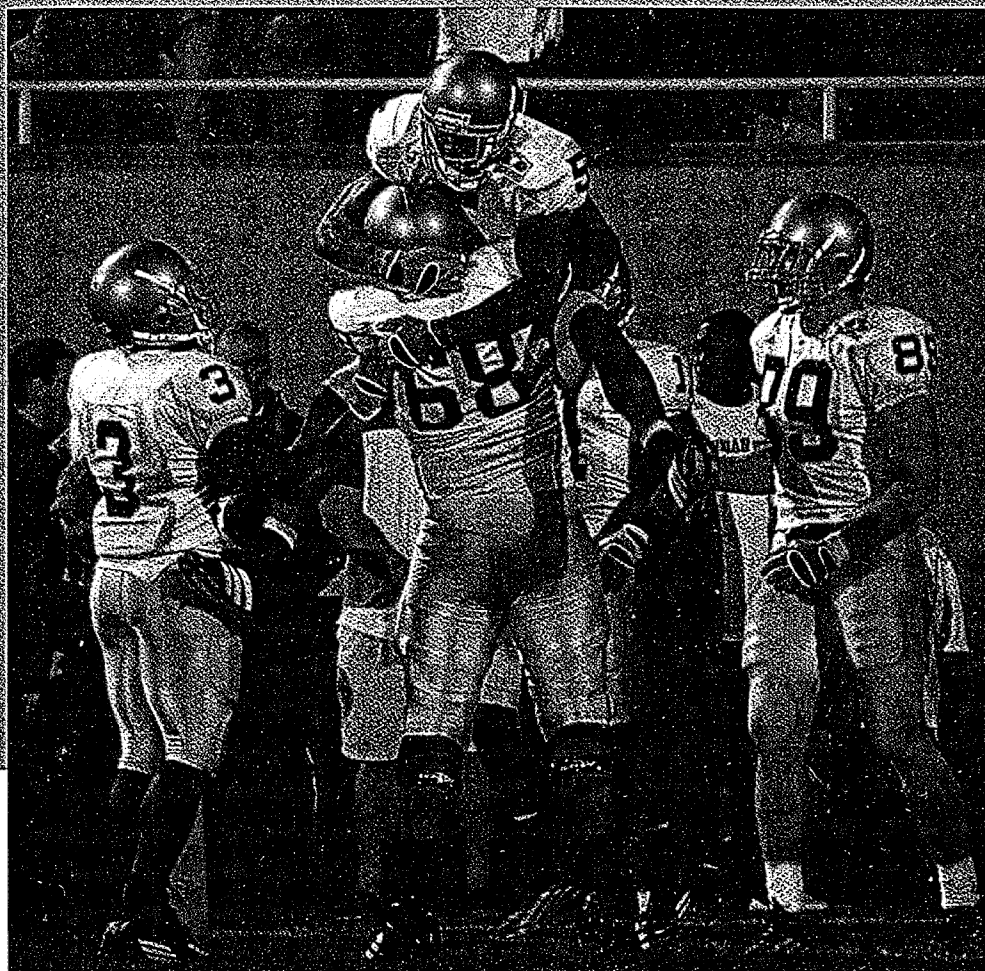
	1	2	3	4	FINAL
ND	0	14	7	19	40
MSU	17	14	6	0	37

KEY STATS

	ND	MSU
First Downs	13	18
Total Offensive Yards	366	388
Interceptions: Number-Yds-TD	2-27-1	1-19-1
Possession Time	24:21	35:39
Third-Down Conversions	1/11	3/14

KEY PERFORMANCES:

Brady Quinn: 20-36, 319 Yards, 1 INT, 5 TDs
 Jeff Samardzija: 7 Receptions, 113 Yards, 2 TDs
 John Carlson: 4 Receptions, 121 Yards, 1 TD
 Rhema McKnight: 4 Receptions, 70 Yards, 2 TDs
 Terrail Lambert: 2 INTs, 1 TD



FROM HUMILIATION TO JUBILATION Senior wide receiver Rhema McKnight celebrates after scoring a touchdown to close the gap between the Irish and the Spartans.

FROM THE PRESS BOX



When Notre Dame trailed Michigan State by 17 points at the end of the first quarter, it was the largest first-quarter deficit for the Irish since their meeting with the Spartans on Sept. 12, 1998, in which they trailed 21-3 early in the game. The Irish proceeded to lose that game in a blowout to the Spartans, who thumped the Irish 45-23.

Irish comeback kid Brady Quinn finished the game with 319 yards passing, which put Quinn over the 300-yard mark for the first time this season. Quinn's impressive performance marked the eighth 300-yard passing game of his career. It was also his fifth career game with at least four touchdown passes and his third career game with at least five.

but for every attempt to get back into the game, Michigan State had an answer. Rhema McKnight pulled in a 32-yard touchdown pass from Brady Quinn only to watch defensive end Ervin Baldwin take an errant Quinn pass back for a touchdown two minutes later. John Carlson sprinted to the endzone on a career-long 62-yard pass reception but the Irish saw that erased by a 30-yard Jehruu Cahrlrick fumble recovery for a touchdown to close out the scoring for the third quarter.

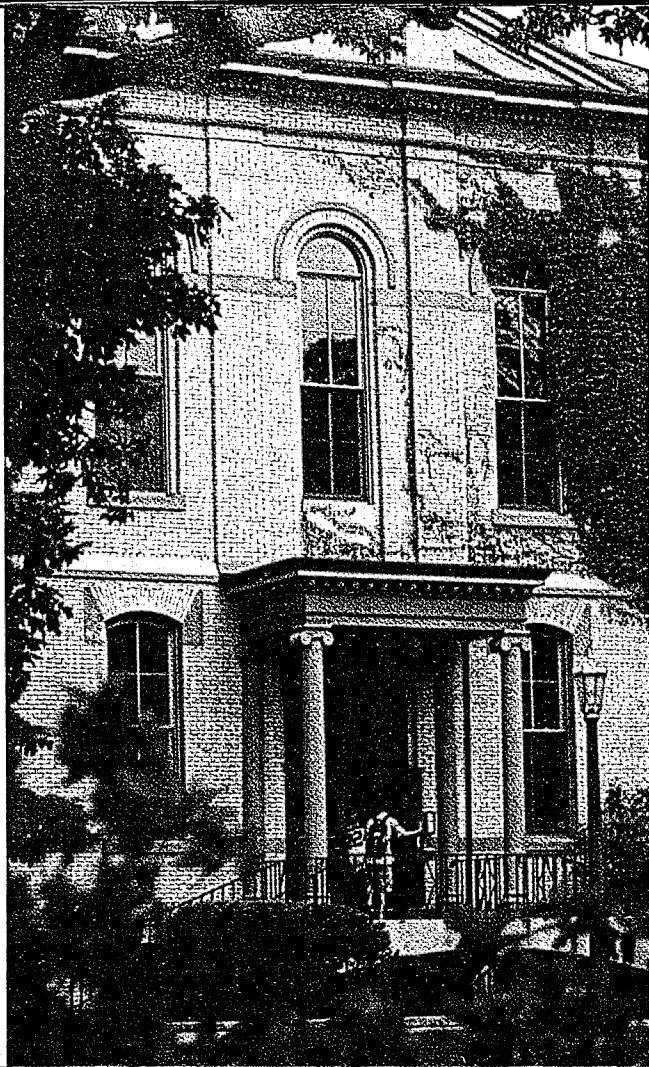
"I think that at halftime the guys realized the season was starting to fall away for us," Weis said after the game. "Everyone could feel the same thing. After the game we played last week, and

now we're down big at halftime [...] it was basically 'Hey fellas, what's it gonna be? Are we just going to be a bunch of also-rans or are we going to come out here and give it a chance to win the game?'"

It wasn't until the fourth quarter began (and the blustering winds shifted against the Irish) that Notre Dame was able to make its final breakthrough. Jeff Samardzija and McKnight grabbed another pair of touchdown passes while Michigan State Head Coach John L. Smith and his Spartans tightened up, as if they realized they were in the midst of another one of the epic meltdowns that had become their trademark.

Rallying behind the powerful arm of

Quinn and a suddenly stout defense, the boys in the gold helmets overcame deficits of 31-14 and 37-21 to cap off a furious fourth quarter rally with a dramatic interception return for a touchdown by cornerback Terrail Lambert. Lambert then picked off Stanton for good measure on the Spartans' last-gasp drive to ensure a 40-37 Irish victory and keep alive BCS and national championship hopes.



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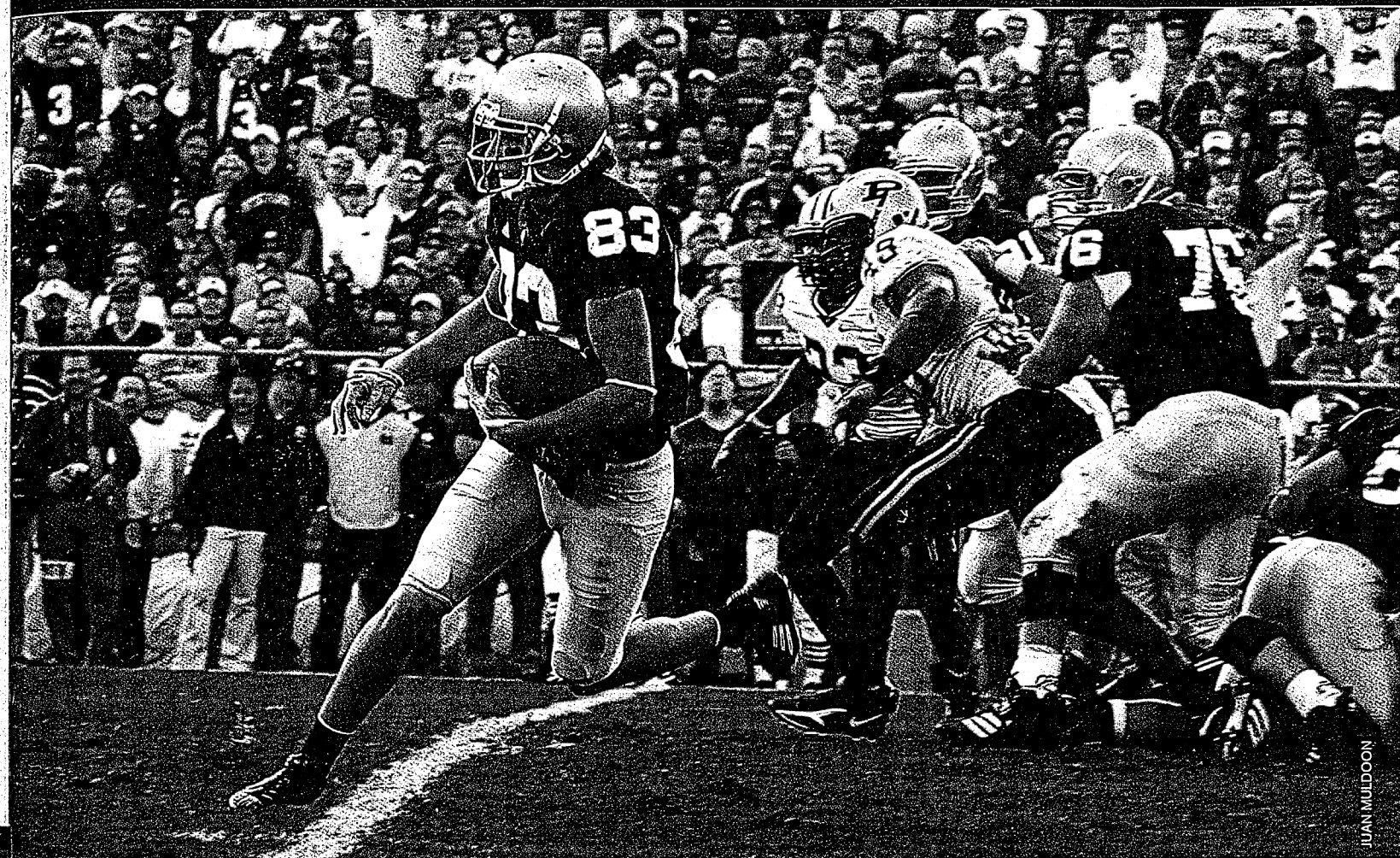


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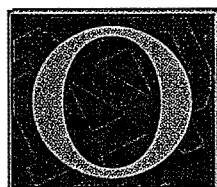




SHARK ATTACK Senior wide receiver Jeff Samardzija sprints right through the Purdue secondary.

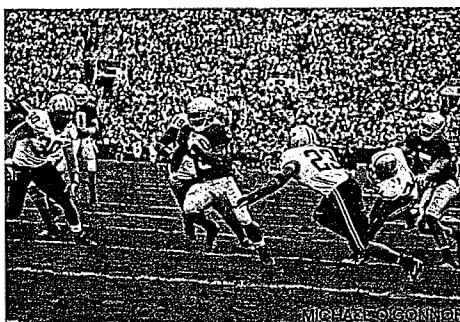
Surviving September

Notre Dame 35 Purdue 21



Christopher Meskill

Over the long summer months, the 2006 Blue Ribbon College Football Yearbook issued a statement that became a rallying cry for ESPN broadcasters leading into the fall season. "If the Irish can get out of September unscathed versus Georgia Tech, Penn State, Michigan, Michigan State and Purdue," they printed, "then a national title game berth is possible." Unfortunately for the Fighting Irish, September proved to be as difficult as predicted, with a humbling loss to Michigan at home, as well as near misses at Georgia Tech and Michigan State. On the last day of September, Notre Dame had an opportunity to end the month on



BOILED OVER Junior running back Darius Walker shredded the Purdue defense and carried the ball 31 times for 146 yards.

a high note against the Boilermakers — one that they would not overlook.

Brady Quinn, who had been shaky in three of his four outings in the young season, pulled back into contention for the Heisman with his 29-of-38, 316-yard performance, resulting in two touchdowns

and, more importantly, a definitive 35-21 Irish victory. Senior center John Sullivan summarized the difference in the post-game press conference. "When [Quinn] does well, success for the whole team follows," he said. Even Purdue Head Coach Joe Tiller was impressed with Quinn, reflecting on his maturation under Charlie Weis after the game. "I think [Quinn] is a much more polished guy than he was as a youngster," Tiller said. "I thought he had great physical talent as a youngster, and now I think he has outstanding physical talent as well as mental skills to help him maximize his abilities."

Quinn, however, was not the only Notre Dame player to have a big game. Junior running back Darius Walker finally netted substantial yardage, with

Notre Dame Stadium

Attendance: 80,795

All-Time Series: 51-25-2

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
PUR	7	7	0	7	21
ND	14	14	7	0	35

KEY STATS

	PUR	ND
First Downs	24	33
Total Offensive Yards	490	454
Interceptions: Number-Yds-TD	0-0-0	0-0-0
Possession Time	21:59	38:01
Third-Down Conversions	4/11	8/14

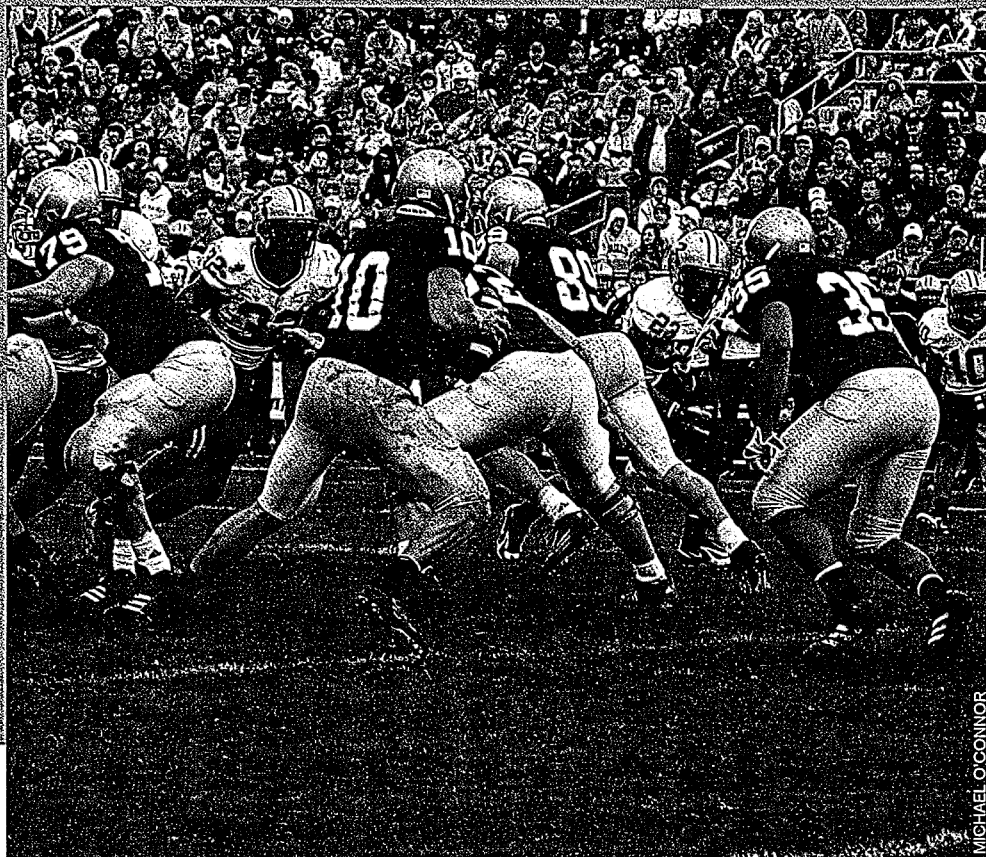
KEY PERFORMANCES:

Brady Quinn: 29-38, 316 Yards, 2 TDs

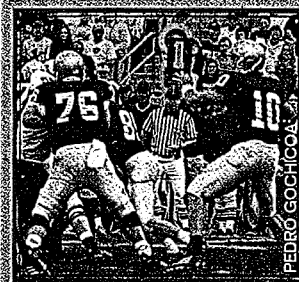
Darius Walker: 31 Carries, 146 Yards

Rhema McKnight: 10 Receptions, 120 Yards, 2 TD

Terrill Lambert: 11 Tackles



FIELD GENERAL Irish quarterback Brady Quinn drops back behind an offensive line that protected Quinn all day. He finished with 316 passing yards and two touchdowns.

FROM THE
PRESS BOX

The potent Irish offensive attack during the first half of the game resulted in a total of 22 first downs, a figure which at that point

equaled the 2006 single-game high mark of 22 set during the Penn State game. The Irish would finish the game with 33 first downs, the most in any game this season.

After suffering a 41-16 defeat to the Boilermakers at Notre Dame Stadium in 2004, the Irish offensive production in the last two meetings has been astounding. During the last two match-ups, the Irish have lit up the Boilermaker defense for a total of 1,075 yards and 65 first downs.

146 yards rushing and 73 yards receiving. Walker's performance reestablished Notre Dame's ground game, after many analysts criticized the "one-dimensional" Fighting Irish offense.

Returning to the patterns of the 2005 season, Notre Dame did its damage early, scoring 28 points in the first half. In fact, the Irish wasted no time against Purdue, scoring on their first drive. Walker made a short reception and followed it with five carries to set up an 11-yard touchdown run by George West. Purdue responded quickly, however, tying the game with a rushing touchdown by Kory Sheets that was set up by a string of completions by quarterback Curtis Painter. For the Boilermakers, Sheets' touchdown would be Purdue's only points until the final seconds of the first half.

Quinn took control of the game after

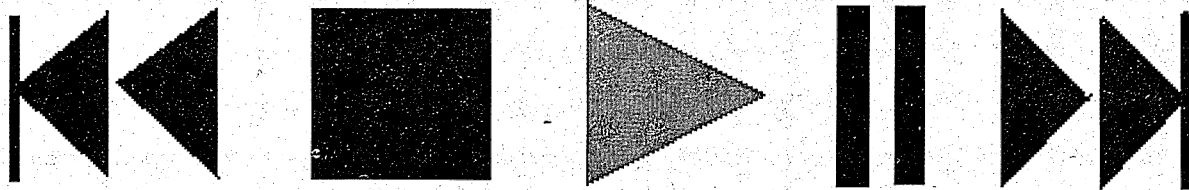
the Purdue touchdown. He made five completions on the very next drive to give Walker an easy score to take the lead. Then, on their first drive of the second quarter, Quinn repeated his performance, completing another five passes, with the last resulting in a 6-yard touchdown to senior wide receiver Rhema McKnight.

While Quinn and Walker did much of the scoring, senior wide receiver Jeff Samardzija put the exclamation point on the half. After an unsuccessful set of downs in the Boilermaker red zone, Notre Dame set up for a short field goal. Samardzija, as the holder, pulled the ball away in *Lucy v. Charlie Brown* fashion and ran into the endzone untouched to give the Irish a 28-7 lead.

The ensuing kick off pinned Purdue at its own 12-yard line with a little more than a minute remaining. After Painter

missed on one pass attempt, he found wide receiver Selwyn Lyman deep for an 88-yard touchdown pass to make it a two-score game headed into the locker room. Lyman, who had 238 receiving yards on the game, had to make a few athletic moves to get the score. "I saw the safety come over, and I was preparing myself for a big hit after the catch," Lyman said. "But I was able to stay on my feet, and I just took off."

The second half saw very little action offensively. Notre Dame and Purdue swapped touchdowns, with McKnight and Lyman each getting his second score of the game. As it stood, Notre Dame held off Purdue in the second half to escape September, not unscathed, but still in the national spotlight.



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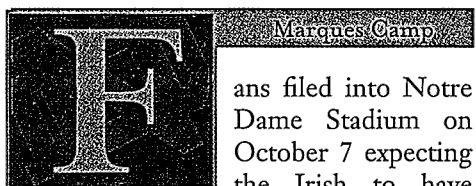
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BREAKAWAY SPEED Darius Walker gained 153 rushing yards and scored one touchdown against the Cardinal defense.

Shooting Down the Cardinal

Notre Dame 31 Stanford 10

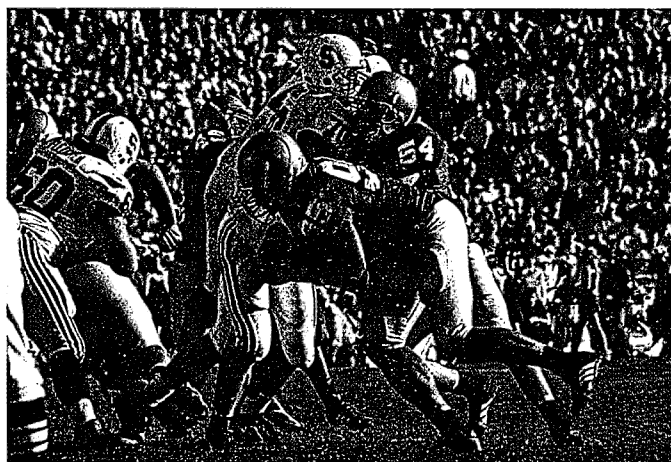


Marques Camp

ans filed into Notre Dame Stadium on October 7 expecting the Irish to have their way with the then-winless Stanford Cardinal. The only question on anyone's mind seemed to be how many points the Brady Quinn-led offense would score on the woeful Cardinal defense. Heading into a bye week, Head Coach Charlie Weis, in an effort to motivate his players, threatened the team with a tough, intense week of practice if they didn't play well. Weis and his squad knew better than to overlook Stanford, who was a late Darius Walker touchdown away from upsetting the Irish in the 2005 regular season finale.

The game started off well for the Irish as Quinn engineered the offense on a meticulous 17-play, 91-yard drive that ended with an 8-yard touchdown strike to Jeff Samardzija to give the Irish the early lead. On the ensuing possession the Cardinal offense, attempting to strike back, went on a 14-play, 71-yard drive. The drive was stopped short of the endzone and ended in a 19-yard field goal by Stanford kicker Aaron Zagory.

There was some anxiety in the stadium as the Irish struggled during the remainder



BATTLING FOR POSITION Senior defensive lineman Victor Abiamiri (95) led all defenders with three sacks on the day.

of the first half to build on their 7-3 lead. They did not gain any more breathing room until Rhema McKnight's 15-yard touchdown reception with 29 seconds to

Notre Dame Stadium

Attendance: 80,795

All-Time Series: 15-6-0

KEY STATS

STAN

ND

First Downs

14

29

Total Offensive Yards

226

436

Third-Down Conversions

1/8

7/13

Red Zone Scores/Chances

1-1

4-4

KEY PERFORMANCES:

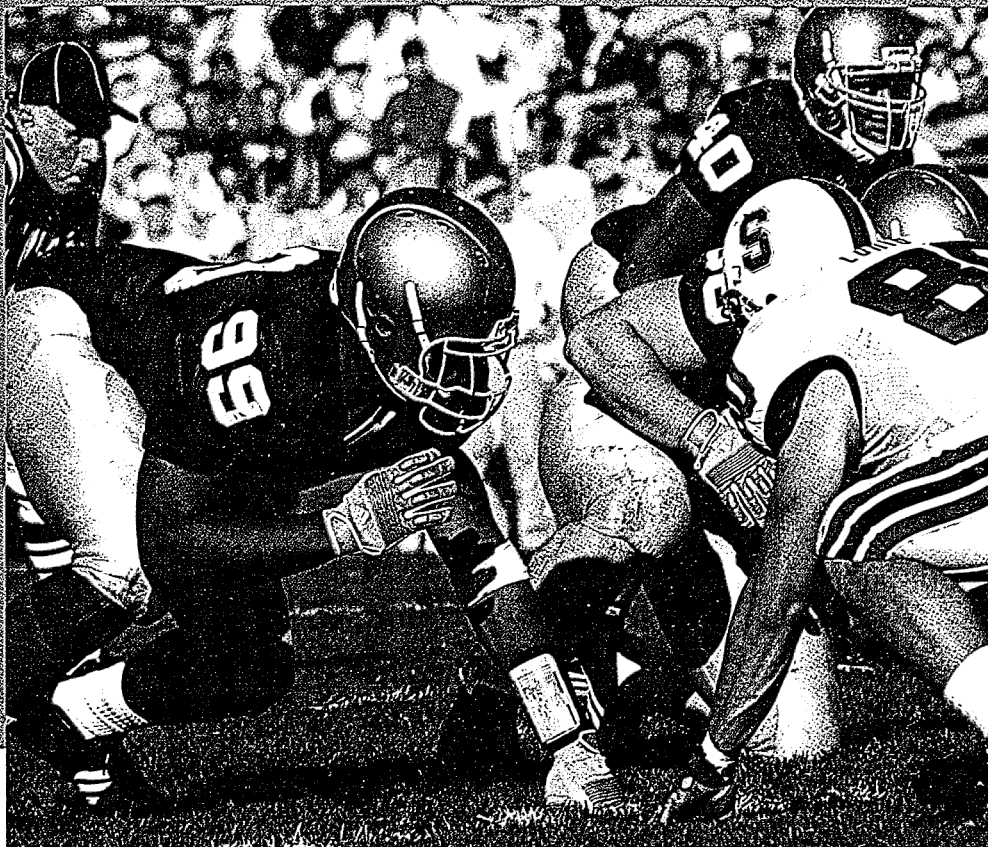
Darius Walker: 25 Carries, 153 Yards, 1 TD

Brady Quinn: 27/37, 232 Yards, 3 TDs

Jeff Samardzija: 7 Receptions, 50 Yards, 1 TD

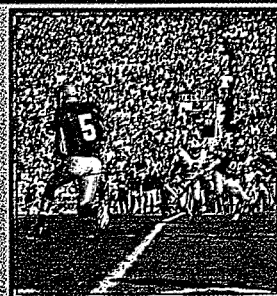
Victor Abiamiri: 3 Sacks

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
STAN	3	0	0	7	10
ND	7	7	10	7	31



THE FINAL TALLEY Ronald Talley (99) played his last game in blue and gold against Stanford, after which he decided to transfer to another university.

FROM THE PRESS BOX



With five catches against Stanford, wide receiver Rhema McKnight continued to write his way into the Notre Dame record

books. During the game McKnight surpassed former Irish greats Tim Brown and Jim Seymour to take the No. 2 spot on the all-time Irish reception list. By the end of his career, McKnight would finish with a total of 170 receptions, a new all-time Notre Dame record. Also, McKnight's touchdown reception made it the fifth consecutive game in which the star wide receiver scored a touchdown. The touchdown was McKnight's seventh of the season and the 14th of his collegiate career.

go in the half, making the game his fifth straight with a touchdown reception. Despite a relatively slow start for the Irish, they ran into the locker room at halftime leading 14-3.

After starting flat, Notre Dame came out looking like a different team in the second half. The Irish marched 76 yards on their opening drive, which culminated in a 32-yard touchdown run by Darius Walker. Walker, who ran for a then-season high 153 yards in the game, gained the bulk of his yards on this drive, accounting for 65 of the drive's 76 total yards. Carl Gioia added a 35-yard field goal after a stalled Stanford drive to put the Irish ahead 24-3 going into the fourth quarter.

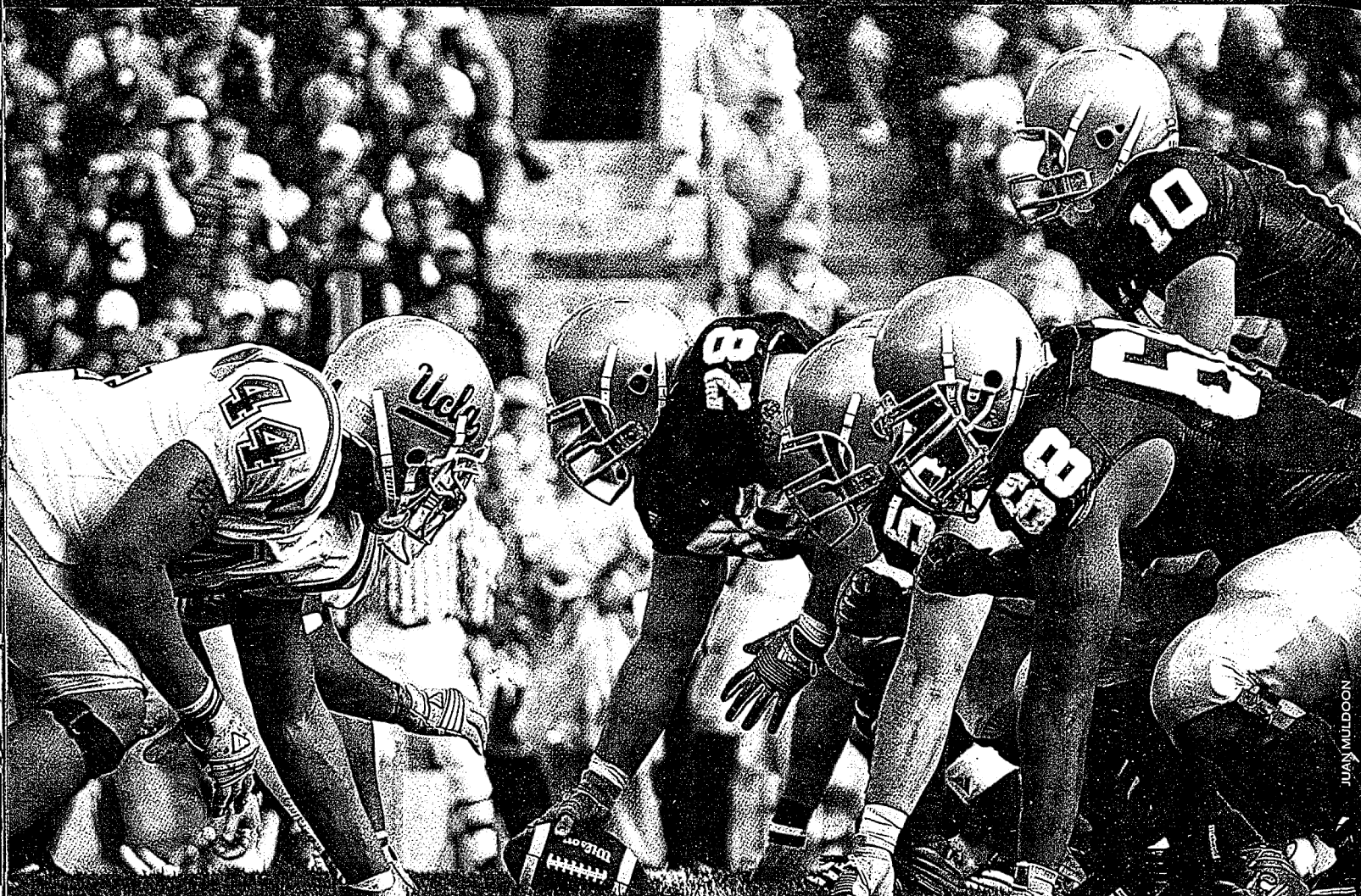
The Irish defense, spearheaded by Victor Abiamiri's three sacks, held the

Cardinal offense to a season-low 226 total yards. They committed their only big mistake early in the fourth quarter, allowing Stanford wide receiver Kelton Lynn to slip free on a 57-yard halfback pass from Anthony Kimble. The touchdown throw closed the margin to 24-10. A few minutes later, however, after a 12-play, 77-yard drive, senior tight end John Carlson made an incredible one-handed diving touchdown grab to push the Irish lead up to 31-10, the eventual final score.

Though the game was not the blowout that many had expected, the Irish were in control for the most part, overcoming a slow start to open up the game in the second half. Quinn finished 27-of-37 for 232 yards and threw three touchdown passes for the fourth time in six games.

This performance, coupled with Walker's superb day on the ground, created the balanced offensive attack against Stanford that Weis was looking for all season. "I always like to call the game that way, where you're heavy more along the balance of 50/50," Weis said after the game. "I think it really puts more of a mental bind on the defense where you can get into not knowing whether it's a run or a pass every time you go out there."

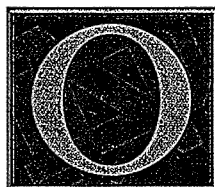
9



BATTLE LINES Notre Dame's offense lines up to gain some yardage on the Bruins, who held Notre Dame to only 20 points.

Foiled Spoiler

Notre Dame 20 UCLA 17



Dan Snyder

n October 21, the UCLA Bruins came to South Bend planning to derail the then-No. 10

Notre Dame Fighting Irish crusade for a BCS match-up. While the Bruins had won only half their games thus far, they boasted one of the most stubborn defenses in the country and seemed poised to stun Notre Dame's high-flying offense. The Bruins would go on later in the season to upset USC's national championship bid but, despite keeping the Irish pinned until the last minute, were unable to foil Notre Dame.

Notre Dame's first drive after kick off ended prematurely with a Darius Walker

fumble on Notre Dame's 39-yard line. UCLA was unable to capitalize on the opportunity, missing a 47-yard field goal attempt a few plays later. The Irish and Bruins then exchanged another round of scoreless drives, with Notre Dame punting after three plays and the Bruins turning the ball over on downs at the UCLA 44-yard line.

With good field position, Brady Quinn and the Irish offense found little resistance on a seven-play drive to the endzone, and Jeff Samardzija caught the 2-yard touchdown pass from Quinn. Notre Dame would have trouble repeating this offensive success for the rest of the game. While Terrail Lambert intercepted UCLA quarterback Patrick Cowan's first down pass following the touchdown, UCLA's defense forced

another three and out.

UCLA's next drive was more successful, as the Bruins moved the ball 87 yards on their first trip to the endzone. The Bruins scored on a deep 54-yard pass from Cowan to Marcus Everett, exploiting the weakness of the Irish secondary. After tying the game, the Bruins held the Irish on two consecutive drives. UCLA then scored again on another 36-yard breakaway pass from Cowan to William Snead.

The Irish tried to respond on the final drive of the first half, but after stalling within 10 yards of the goal line, they settled for a field goal as the clock expired, leaving the game 14-10 UCLA at the half.

The third quarter proved to be a high-impact defensive battle. On the first five

Notre Dame Stadium

Attendance: 80,795

All-Time Series: 3-0-0

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
UCLA	0	14	0	3	17
ND	7	3	3	7	20

KEY STATS

	UCLA	ND
First Downs	12	20
Total Offensive Yards	243	345
Net Rushing Yards	26	41
Possession Time	25:46	34:14
Fourth-Down Conversions	0/1	4/5

KEY PERFORMANCES:

Brady Quinn: 27-45, 304 Yards, 2 TDs
 Jeff Samardzija: 8 Receptions, 118 Yards, 2 TDs
 David Grimes: 8 Receptions, 79 Yards
 Maurice Crum: 8 Tackles



TEAM TACKLE Maurice Crum (40), Chris Frome (75) and Chinedum Ndukwe (18) take down UCLA's tailback behind the line of scrimmage.

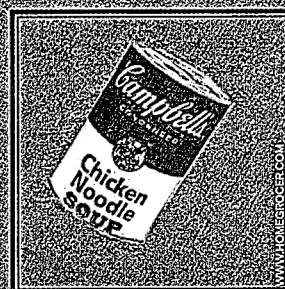
drives, both offenses moved the ball a combined total of 25 yards. Notre Dame broke the stalemate later in the quarter with a 60-yard drive that ended in a 33-yard field goal by Carl Gioia. At the end of the third, UCLA held the ball and a 14-13 lead.

With the Irish offense still unable to take control of the game, Notre Dame's defense hoped to keep the Bruins quiet in the fourth quarter. Despite the defensive efforts of the Irish, the Bruins kicked a field goal midway through the quarter, extending their lead to four points. Notre Dame urgently needed a touchdown, yet their drive after the UCLA field goal quickly ended in another punt. UCLA's next drive mirrored Notre Dame's, giving the Irish another opportunity with 3:33 remaining on the clock. But again,

Notre Dame's potent no-huddle offense came up short, turning the ball over on downs after a rapid drive to the UCLA 35-yard line.

With 2:20 remaining, UCLA hoped to overcome the Irish defense to lock away the game, but the energized defenders held their ground. Using all three of their remaining timeouts, the Irish put the ball in Quinn's hands one more time with 55 seconds left on the clock. From the Notre Dame 20-yard line, Quinn quickly moved the ball with a 21-yard pass to Samardzija. Without hesitation, the offense reassembled and Quinn threw a 14-yard pass to David Grimes for another first down to stop the dwindling clock. Still 45 yards from the endzone with only 27 seconds remaining, Quinn again threw long to Samardzija, who

FROM THE PRESS BOX



Notre Dame's 20-14 comeback win was only the third time that the Irish won a game with a touchdown in the last 30 seconds. The other two games are legendary to Irish fans. In 1979, Notre Dame prevailed in the Cotton Bowl 35-34 over Houston after three touchdowns from quarterback Joe Montana in the last eight minutes of the game. The game is remembered as the "Chicken Soup Game" as an ill Montana sat out for the third quarter, yet returned to lead the Irish to victory after eating a bowl of chicken soup. The next historic victory came in 1992, with quarterback Rick Mirer and halfback Jerome Bettis coming together for a touchdown and two-point conversion to vault the Irish over Penn State, 17-16. This vicious game at Notre Dame Stadium is remembered as the "Snow Bowl" for the snowstorm that plagued both teams throughout the game.

dodged past several UCLA defenders on his way to the endzone for the winning touchdown. UCLA had little opportunity to respond as Derek Landri sacked Cowan to end the game.

The dramatic victory marked another historic game for the famed Irish and proved the resiliency of Charlie Weis' squad. "Good teams win games like that," Weis said in a post-game interview. "Good teams make a play at the end of the game to win." **6**



GROUND ATTACK Darius Walker runs past a Midshipmen defender on the way to his third 100-yard rushing game this season.

Coming Back for More

Notre Dame 38 Navy 14

Despite a losing streak unmatched by any other team in college football history (42

straight losses to Notre Dame coming into the 2006 game), the Midshipmen of the Naval Academy still greet their annual battle with the Irish with an air of excitement and revelry. Why?

Because every year, this game could be "the" game.

The Midshipmen filed into M&T Bank Stadium in Baltimore with poise and dignity, filling the field with their precise ranks. Once in the stands, however, they erupted in cheers and clapped their plastic thundersticks wildly. Unfortunately for Navy, the Irish offense wielded the true



FULL EXTENSION Receiver Jeff Samardzija out-jumps two defenders for the touchdown.

thunder as Brady Quinn led an air and ground offensive against the Midshipmen, rolling to a 38-14 victory.

The cards were stacked against the Midshipmen from the start. Navy senior quarterback Brian Hampton was sidelined due to injury, and Navy

was forced to give sophomore quarterback Kaipo-Noa Kaheaku-Enhada his first collegiate start. In addition, a sellout crowd of 71,851 appeared to be predominantly

blue, green and gold — a relative home away from home for the Irish.

While the Irish offense opened the game with a 40-yard Carl Gioia field goal, the true test was on the defense. Could the Irish hold back an option rushing attack that was unlike anything they had seen all year? Early indications were less than stellar, as three of Navy's first four rushing plays went for 10, 17 and 19 yards. The defense adjusted on the fly, and Victor Abiamiri crushed the Mids' momentum as he sacked Kaheaku-Enhada for a 6-yard loss on third and eight at the 9-yard line. The Irish then caught a big break as Matt Stover's 32-yard field goal went wide.

Rolling out of the pocket and making an impressive running cross-body throw, Quinn capped the ensuing Irish drive

M&T Bank Stadium

Attendance: 71,851

All-Time Series: 70-9-1

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
--	---	---	---	---	-------

ND 10 14 7 7 38

Navy 0 14 0 0 14

KEY STATS

	ND	Navy
Net Passing Yards	295	243
Total Offensive Yards	471	314
Fumble Number-Lost	0-0	2-1
Possession Time	30:39	29:21
Sacks By: Number-Yards	4-21	1-8

KEY PERFORMANCES:

Brady Quinn: 18-25, 295 Yards, 3 Passing TDs, 1 Rushing TD

Darius Walker: 20 Carries, 103 Yards

Rhema McKnight: 6 Receptions, 94 Yards, 2 TDs

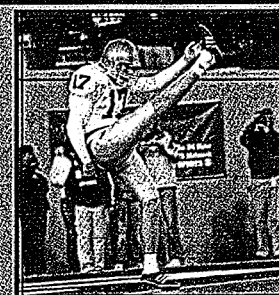
David Grimes: 3 Receptions, 72 Yards, 1 TD

Tom Zbikowski: 14 Tackles



OUT OF OPTIONS After a slow start, the Irish defense adjusted and shut down Navy's option attack.

FROM THE PRESS BOX



With the Irish offense maintaining a consistent level of production, Notre Dame made it through the entire game without punting the ball. Interestingly enough, this was the second straight meeting against Navy in which Notre Dame managed to avoid a single punt. The Irish have now gone 140 consecutive plays against Navy without having to kick it away. The last time the Irish were forced to punt against the Midshipmen was in 2004, when kicker DJ Fitzpatrick punted in the fourth quarter of a 27-9 Notre Dame victory.

with a 36-yard touchdown pass to David Grimes, the first touchdown reception of his career as well as his longest career catch to that point. His diving reception was a welcome glimpse into the future for the Irish, setting at ease fans worried about who might fill the shoes of departing seniors Rhema McKnight and Jeff Samardzija.

Frustratingly, the Irish allowed Navy to stay in the game in the first half. Derek Landri jumped offside on fourth and one at the Navy 29-yard line, giving Navy the first down and much-needed momentum. The Irish allowed the Mids to rush for 45 yards in three plays, and Kaheaku-Enhada completed his first pass for 19 yards to bring Navy to the Irish 2-yard line. A quarterback sneak gave the Mids the score.

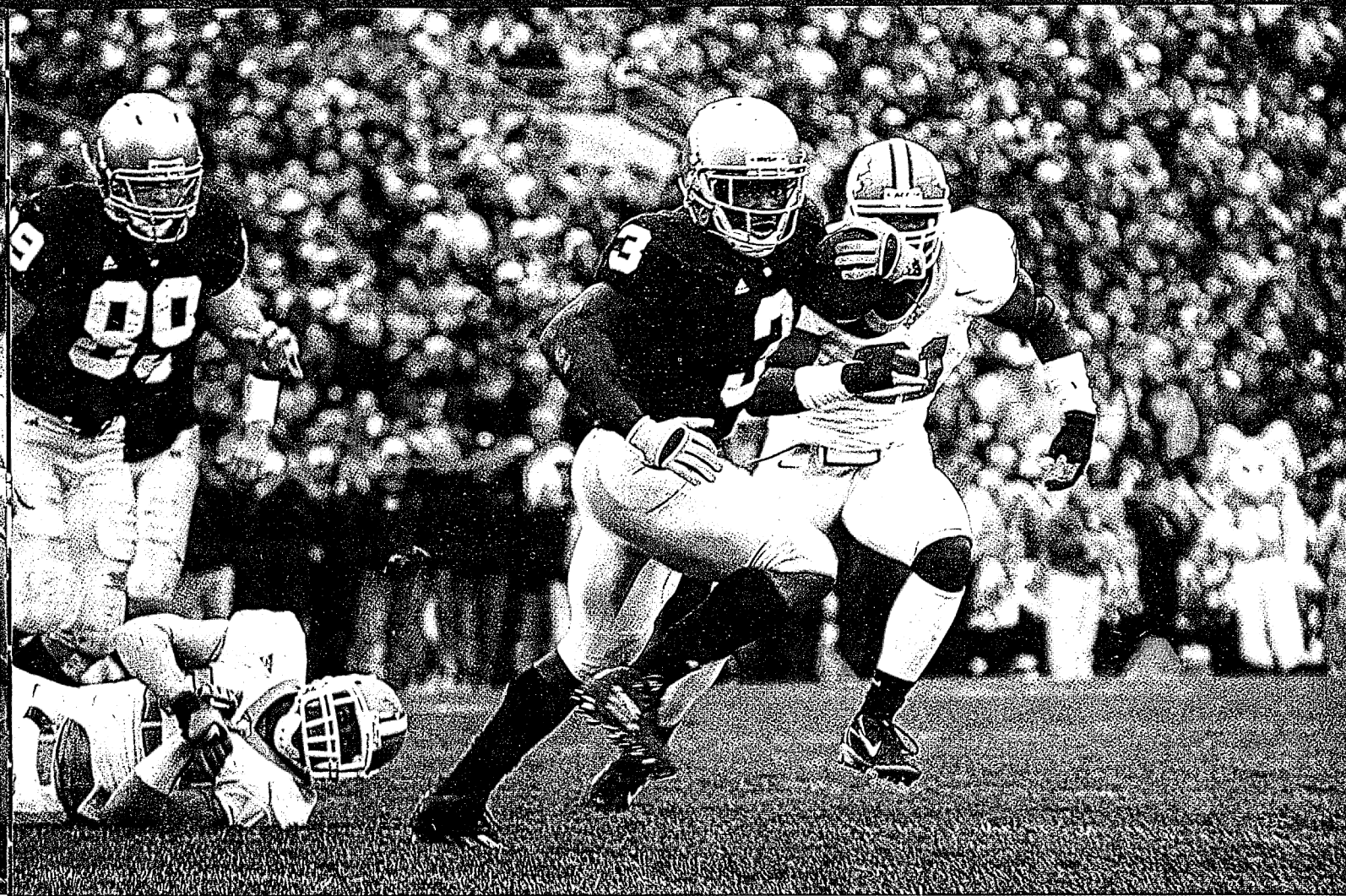
Travis Thomas ran 16 yards for a touchdown in his first rushing attempt since the Penn State game — where his last carry also resulted in a touchdown — but the Mids answered back with a 65-yard touchdown drive of their own.

It would be their last, as the Irish defense clamped down and the Irish offense exploded. Quinn threw a 33-yard pass to McKnight to make it 24-14 at the half. The defense then held Navy to a three and out to start the third quarter, and the Irish fired back with an ironic twist — Quinn scrambled 19 yards for a touchdown. He ended the day with an additional 6-yard touchdown pass to McKnight and was 18-of-25 passing for 295 yards, with three touchdowns and no interceptions.

The offense showed the same swagger

and confidence that appeared so promising in the Penn State home opener, gaining 471 total yards and never punting. And the defense showed that it had the power to make second-half adjustments, allowing 228 yards in the first half but only 85 in the second half.

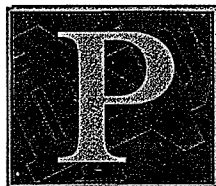
Navy struggled late against Notre Dame but showed life and a competitive spirit. Kaheaku-Enhada finished the season with respectable pass yardage and nearly beat ACC power Boston College in the Meineke Car Care Bowl. While pundits may mark the victory in retrospect as the first “cupcake” academy game en route to a faux Irish Commander's Cup, history gives it a different perspective: respecting the tradition of a school tough enough to keep coming back for more.



KICKING UP HIS HEELS Darius Walker dances past North Carolina defenders.

On the Heels of Victory

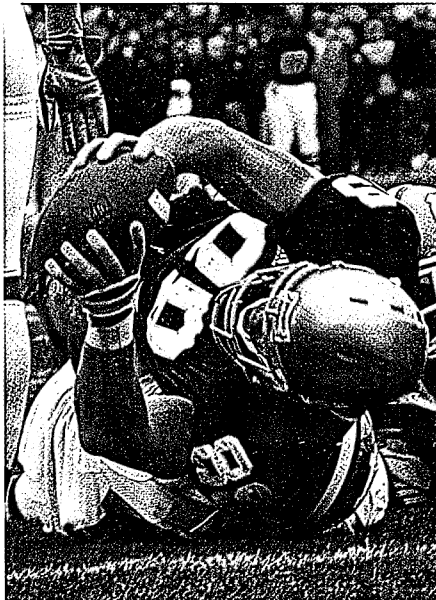
Notre Dame 45 UNC 26



Mike Healy

Prior to the 2006 season, many observers expected the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame to be a team that made its living by winning shootouts. Questions abounded about the defense, but there was faith that the Irish could defend their goal just enough times to allow Charlie Weis' sleek offense to beat opponents into submission. When these predictions were made, Notre Dame's 45-26 triumph over the North Carolina Tar Heels on November 4 was exactly the type of win the Irish were expecting.

On the strength of a season-high 346-yard day from Brady Quinn and a 53-yard punt return for a touchdown by Tom



REACHING OUT Tight end John Carlson dives into the endzone on an 11-yard touchdown reception.

Zbikowski, Notre Dame simply outclassed the Tar Heels who, to their credit, played with a great deal more vigor and spark than one would expect from a one-win team with a lame duck head coach. It looked as if the Notre Dame starters might be in for a short day, as the Irish jumped out to a quick 24-7 lead thanks to three Quinn touchdown passes (an 11-yard pass to tight end John Carlson and tosses of 7 and 14 yards to wide receiver Rhema McKnight) and a picture-perfect field goal by Carl Gioia.

As was the case for Notre Dame all too often in 2006, however, the opposition was able to utilize a spate of big plays to stay in the game despite the best efforts of safeties Zbikowski and Chinedum Ndukwe. North Carolina took advantage of a kickoff return for a touchdown by

Notre Dame Stadium

Attendance: 80,795

All-Time Series: 16-1-0

KEY STATS

UNC

ND

Total Offensive Yards

244

452

Third-Down Conversions

4/13

8/14

Punt Returns: Number-Yards-TD

1-16-0

5-84-1

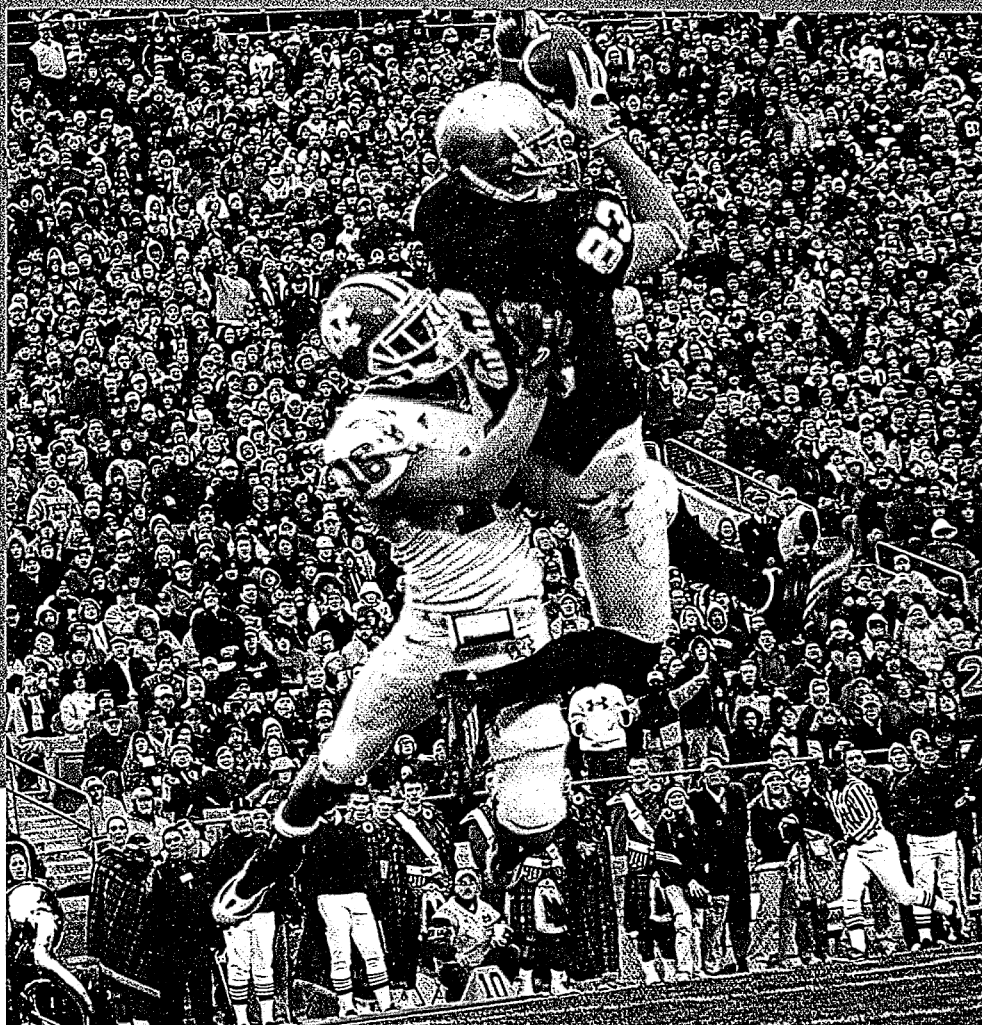
KEY PERFORMANCES:

Brady Quinn: 23-35, 346 Yards, 4 TDs

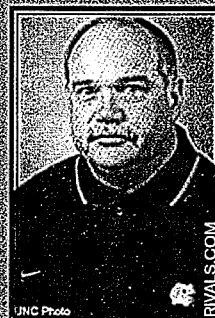
Jeff Samardzija: 6 Receptions, 177 Yards, 1 TD

John Carlson: 8 Receptions, 91 Yards, 1 TD

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
UNC	7	6	13	0	26
ND	14	17	7	7	45



UP FOR GRABS Wide Receiver Jeff Samardzija pulls down a Brady Quinn pass.

FROM THE
PRESS BOX

Sandwiched in the middle of a string of games played against the three U.S. military academies, Notre Dame benefited from playing against another highly overmatched opponent — this one with a lame duck head coach.

Just a week and a half before playing Notre Dame, North Carolina fired its embattled six-year head coach, John Bunting, but allowed him to finish out the season. Despite entering the game with a 1-7 record and losing badly to the Irish, Bunting managed to finish out his tenure at North Carolina by winning two of his last three games. After losing 7-0 to Georgia Tech in a valiant effort the following week, UNC defeated in-state rivals N.C. State and Duke to finish their lackluster season at 3-9.

Brandon Tate and a six-catch, 171-yard, two-touchdown day by freshman receiver Hakeem Nicks to keep the Tar Heels on the periphery of competitiveness.

Junior tailback Darius Walker put the game away on a 1-yard plunge to end the scoring at 45-26 with a little more than 11 minutes to go in the fourth quarter. Mop-up action was highlighted by the strong running of freshman running back James Aldridge, who carried the ball eight times for 45 yards and ran with a determination that gives Notre Dame fans reason for optimism in the wake of Walker's departure to the 2007 NFL draft.

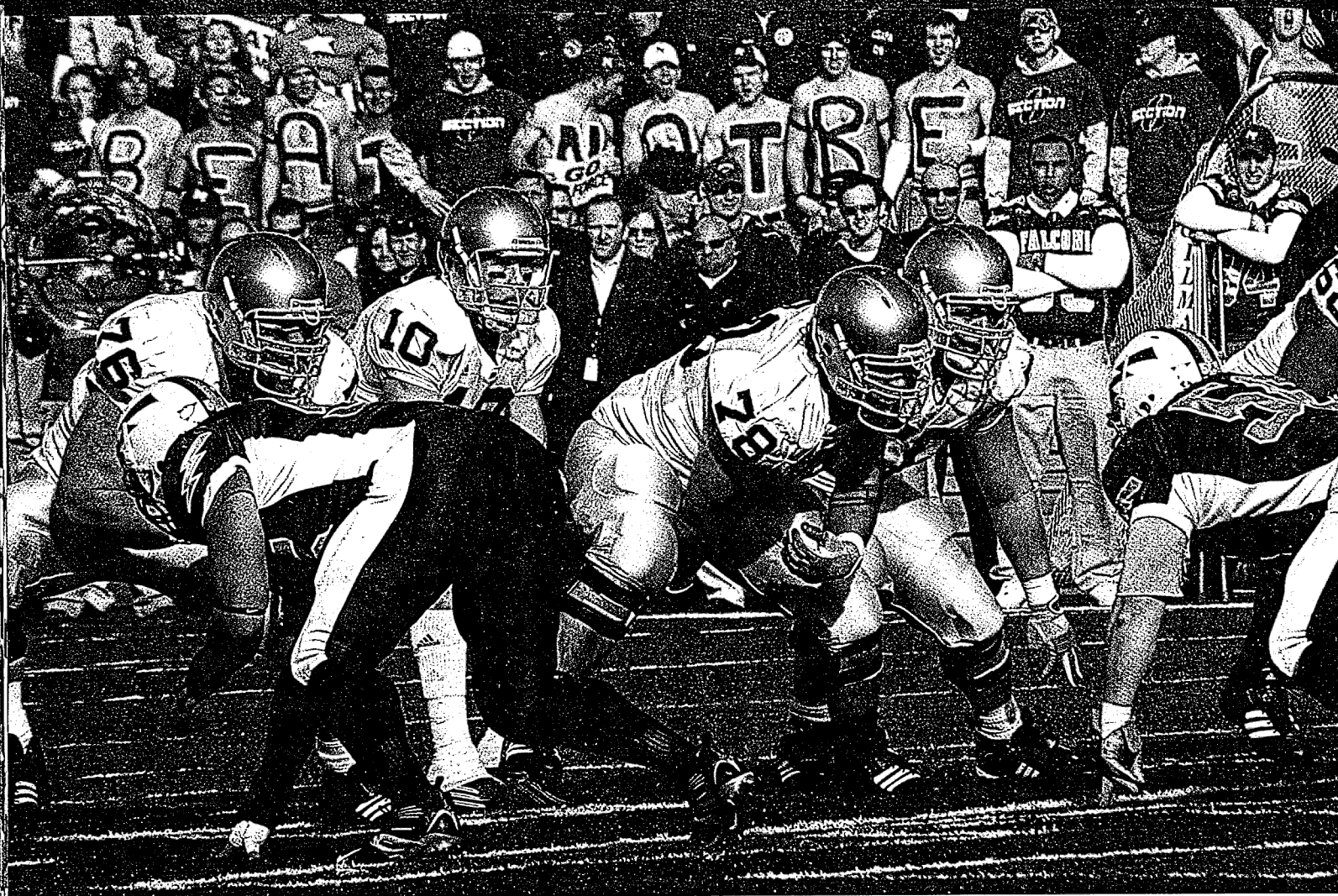
Of further note to the Irish was Jeff Samardzija's 42-yard touchdown reception in the third quarter, which gave him the all-time school record for touchdown catches with 23. Additionally, North Carolina's 26 points were the second most scored by the Tar Heels against a Division I-A opponent this year, surpassed only by a 45-point outburst against Duke in the final week of the season.

Following the game, Weis was not displeased with the easier-than-usual, yet closer-than-expected victory, stating that he wasn't preoccupied with "any crescendo or fever pitch or anything as far

as a team on the rise. I'm just concerned with us getting better."

As the USC and LSU losses later in the season would show, it seems North Carolina may have exposed Notre Dame's Achilles' heel. They just couldn't capitalize on it.

S



AIR STRIKE Quarterback Brady Quinn receives the snap from center John Sullivan while eyeing the Falcon secondary.

A Force to be Reckoned With

Notre Dame 39 Air Force 17

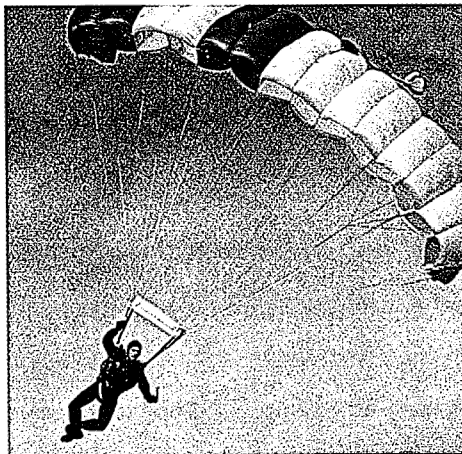
T

Alex Hellmuth
& Brittany Lash

he Irish were out-gained in total yards 383 to 405, held the ball for 17 fewer minutes, had three extra points blocked or botched, and even had five fewer first downs than the Falcons.

On paper, these signs might indicate a close game, but in reality, the Irish played their most efficient and focused football of the season, unleashing a quick and nasty game plan that shut down Air Force early and often.

On November 11, the No. 9 Irish went to Colorado Springs to face an unranked Air Force squad that had demolished Army 43-7 the previous weekend. The Falcons planned to dominate the run



HIGH FLYIN' Air Force Cadets parachute into the stadium before the game.

game, coming into the game ranked third in the NCAA in this category, averaging 267 rushing yards per game.

In just 54 seconds, however, it became

clear who would dominate. Brady Quinn completed two straight passes for 29 and 51 yards to Jeff Samardzija to start the game, going 80 yards for the touchdown in just under a minute. Air Force went three and out, and Quinn produced four straight completions capped by a 1-yard touchdown pass to John Carlson to put the Irish up 14-0 in only six minutes.

Air Force quarterback Shaun Carney completed a 24-yard pass to receiver Beau Suder to set up the Falcons' only points of the half, a field goal from 32 yards out. The Irish looked set to give back the ball on fourth and twelve, but a roughing the kicker penalty gave the Irish the first down and Quinn threw a 24-yard touchdown pass to Rhema McKnight.

In the first possession of the second

Falcon Stadium

Attendance: 49,367

All-Time Series: 22-5-0

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
ND	20	7	6	6	39
AF	3	0	7	7	17

KEY STATS

	ND	AF
Total Offensive Yards	383	405
Possession Time	21:25	38:35
Third-Down Conversions	3/7	9/17
Red-Zone Scores-Chances	2-2	3-5

KEY PERFORMANCES:

Brady Quinn: 14-19, 207 Yards, 4 TDs
 Darius Walker: 15 Carries, 153 Yards, 1 TD
 Jeff Samardzija: 6 Receptions, 106 Yards, 1 TD
 Terrail Lambert: 76-Yard Blocked
 Field Goal Return
 Chinedum Ndukwe: 22 Tackles



STEPPING IN, STEPPING UP Tight end Marcus Freeman, in for the injured John Carlson, makes a 28-yard touchdown reception.

FROM THE PRESS BOX



During Gerry Faust's sophomore season as head coach of Notre Dame, he made one of the biggest publicity faux pas of his short career. Following a 30-17 drumming at the hands of Air Force, Faust said, "The next time they beat us, the boys on the field will be captains." As fate would have it, the Falcons beat Faust's Irish in the following three seasons (23-22, 21-7, 21-15), before first-year Head Coach Lou Holtz righted the ship with a 31-3 win in 1986. Since then, Air Force has only beaten the Irish once — Holtz's last season as head coach.

quarter, the Falcons drove 63 yards to set up a field goal only to have it blocked, yielding a 76-yard touchdown return by junior Terrail Lambert. Air Force stalled on a fourth and three on its next possession, and the Irish headed to the locker room leading 27-3.

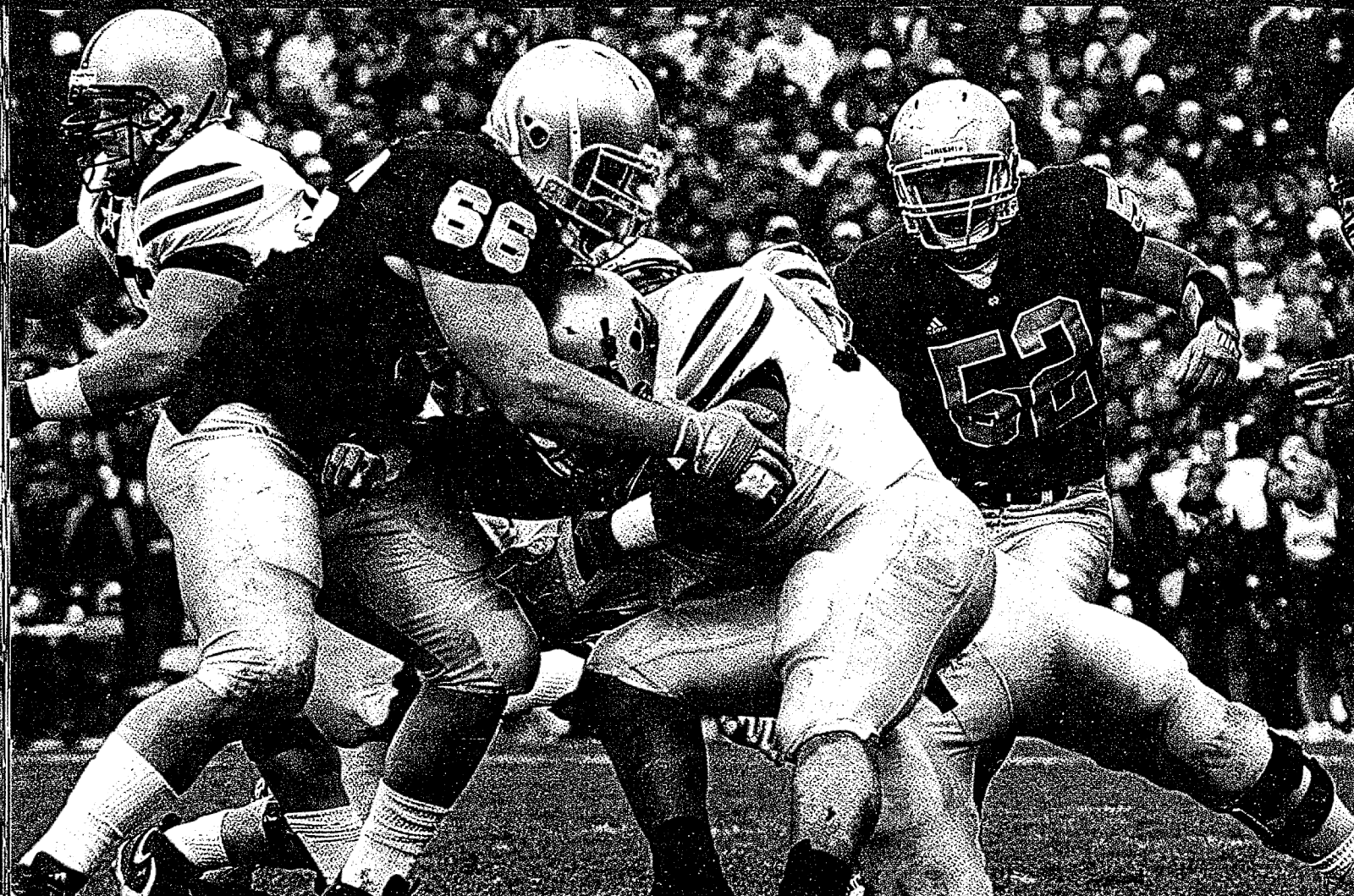
In the third quarter, senior tight end Marcus Freeman, filling in after starting tight end John Carlson left the game with a knee injury, caught the first touchdown pass of his career, a 23-yard grab, to boost the Irish to 33-3. The Falcons finally reciprocated at the end of the third quarter with a 12-yard pass from Carney to Suder for a touchdown. Darius Walker, who rushed for a total of 153 yards, scored the final touchdown of the game in the 12th minute of the fourth quarter.

Many of the newest Irish players saw some playing time. Thirteen freshmen got in the game, including running backs James Aldridge and Munir Prince. Samardzija had six catches for 106 yards, and Quinn had 207 passing yards, four touchdowns and no interceptions.

While Air Force almost matched Quinn with 205 passing yards and surpassed the Irish with 220 rushing yards (the Irish had 189), the Falcons were clearly no match for Charlie Weis' quick, effective game plan. As Weis said in the post-game conference, "I think their expectation level is going up. Just like every fan and follower of Notre Dame football, when things around them start helping, when other teams start losing, that causes optimism for them as well."

The game marked the first time that

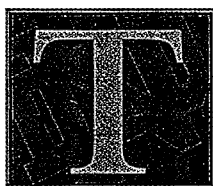
Irish football was broadcast on CSTV, a college sports cable network only available in select satellite packages and online. It was the first Irish game since 1992 that was not broadcast on NBC, CBS, ABC or ESPN, and frustrated students had to go to game watches or sports bars or take a road trip to enjoy the game. For students who missed the game, the win was easy to predict. The victory advanced the Irish to a 35-1 record against service academies in the past 20 years — the one loss to Air Force a decade ago in South Bend. The Irish left Colorado Springs with a 39-17 win, a 9-1 record, and their eighth straight road win, ready to return home to face Army and finish their sweep of the service academies.



STOPPED SHORT Defensive tackle Derek Landri (66) wraps up an Army rusher.

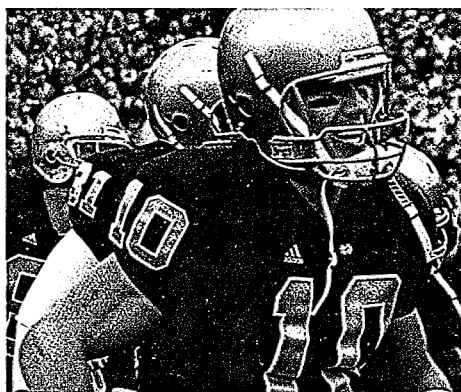
Mission Accomplished

Notre Dame 41 Army 9



Grant Schmidt

he No. 6 Fighting Irish came out of the tunnel fired up, proudly wearing the infamous green jerseys that first appeared in the 1977 win over USC. The Irish hoped to restore glory to the green jerseys, which have seen Irish losses in their last four appearances. Notre Dame (9-1) was going for its eighth straight win against a weaker Army team (3-7 at the time) in the final home game of the season. It was a special game for the graduating seniors, and seniors Brady Quinn, Jeff Samardzija and Rhema McKnight all had excellent performances. Quinn passed for 218 yards, completing 22-of-30 passes along with three touchdown



BREAKING THE CURSE In his final home game Brady Quinn helped the Irish break a four-game losing streak in the green jerseys.

passes. Samardzija had nine catches for 87 yards and a touchdown. McKnight had two touchdown catches, 8- and 24-yard receptions. With 162 yards rushing, junior running back Darius Walker

reached his second 1,000-yard rushing season, becoming only the fourth player in Notre Dame history to do so.

Army chose to receive to start the game, and fans quickly began to wonder if the curse of the green jersey would continue as the Black Knights opened with a 42-yard return. Army could not get anything going in the first series and had to punt, but Notre Dame's first series ended with Quinn's first interception in seven games and 226 passes.

The Irish defense made sure that Army did not capitalize on the interception, and they forced a turnover on downs when Army went for a first down on fourth and four. But again, the Notre Dame offense could not execute effectively and were tagged with a 10-yard penalty followed by a 10-yard loss on a catch by Walker.

Notre Dame Stadium

Attendance: 80,795

All-Time Series: 37-8-4

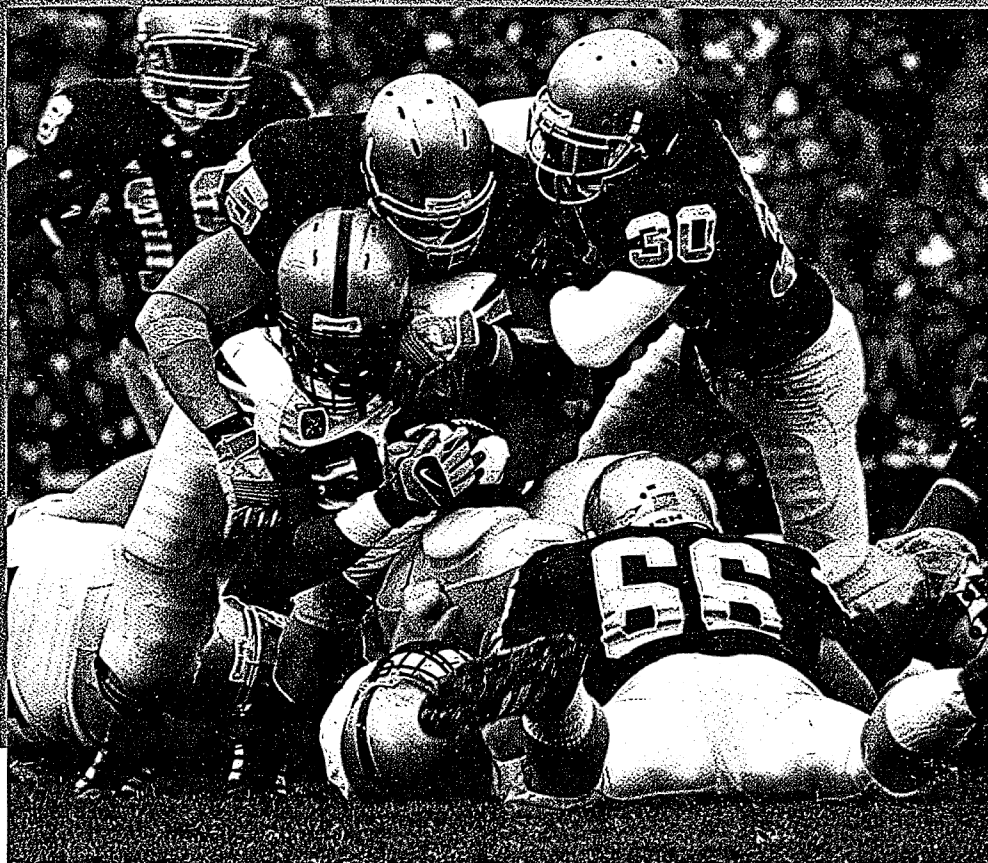
	1	2	3	4	FINAL
ARMY	3	0	0	6	9
ND	0	20	14	7	41

KEY STATS

	ARMY	ND
First Downs	12	26
Total Offensive Yards	150	439
Fumbles: Number-Lost	2-1	4-1
Sacks By: Number-Yards	1-3	3-20

KEY PERFORMANCES:

Darius Walker: 24 Carries, 162 Yards, 2 TDs
 Brady Quinn: 22-30, 218 Yards, 3 TDs, 1 INT
 Rhema McKnight: 3 Receptions, 50 Yards, 2 TDs
 Mike Richardson: 2 INTs



BIG STRONG MEN Chris Frome (75), Mike Richardson (30) and Derek Landri converge to make the tackle.

Geoff Price punted again, giving Army an opportunity to be the first to score.

Army took advantage of that opportunity. A 16-yard completion to Tony Moore and a 24-yard rush by Wesley McMahon set up a 27-yard field goal. But heading into the second quarter after this field goal, the Irish began to establish the running game and never looked back. Walker had three solid runs leading up to his 10-yard touchdown, which made the score 7-3 in favor of Notre Dame.

The Irish defense came through again, forcing Army to go three and out and setting up Notre Dame's second straight touchdown series. This drive was led by Quinn's seven completions and was capped off by Samardzija's 16-yard touchdown grab. A missed extra point put the score at 13-3.

On the following drive, senior tackle Derek Landri drilled the Army quarterback for an 8-yard loss that forced Army to punt, opening the door for the third straight Irish touchdown. Walker and freshman running back James Aldridge contributed to the drive, and Quinn connected with senior Rhema McKnight for an 8-yard touchdown to put Notre Dame up 20-3 at the half.

Notre Dame's fourth consecutive score was a little more interesting. Walker capped four big runs with a fumble on the 1-yard line, and David Grimes recovered the fumble in the endzone for a touchdown, putting the Irish ahead by 24. The defense made sure that the Black Knights had no answer as senior Mike Richardson came up with an interception. A 24-yard pass to McKnight added a fifth

consecutive touchdown.

A blocked Army field goal was recovered by Terrail Lambert, and the defense continued to shine with another interception by Richardson (followed by Walker's second touchdown run, making it 41-3) and a fumble recovery by Ray Herring.

With two and a half minutes remaining, the starters left the game to a standing ovation. A last-second Army touchdown made the final score 41-9, but it did not dampen the celebration. As the Irish seniors ended their last home game with a final lap around Notre Dame Stadium, Quinn leapt into the student section to sing the alma mater and join in the "Beat SC!" chant that swept through the student body.

9

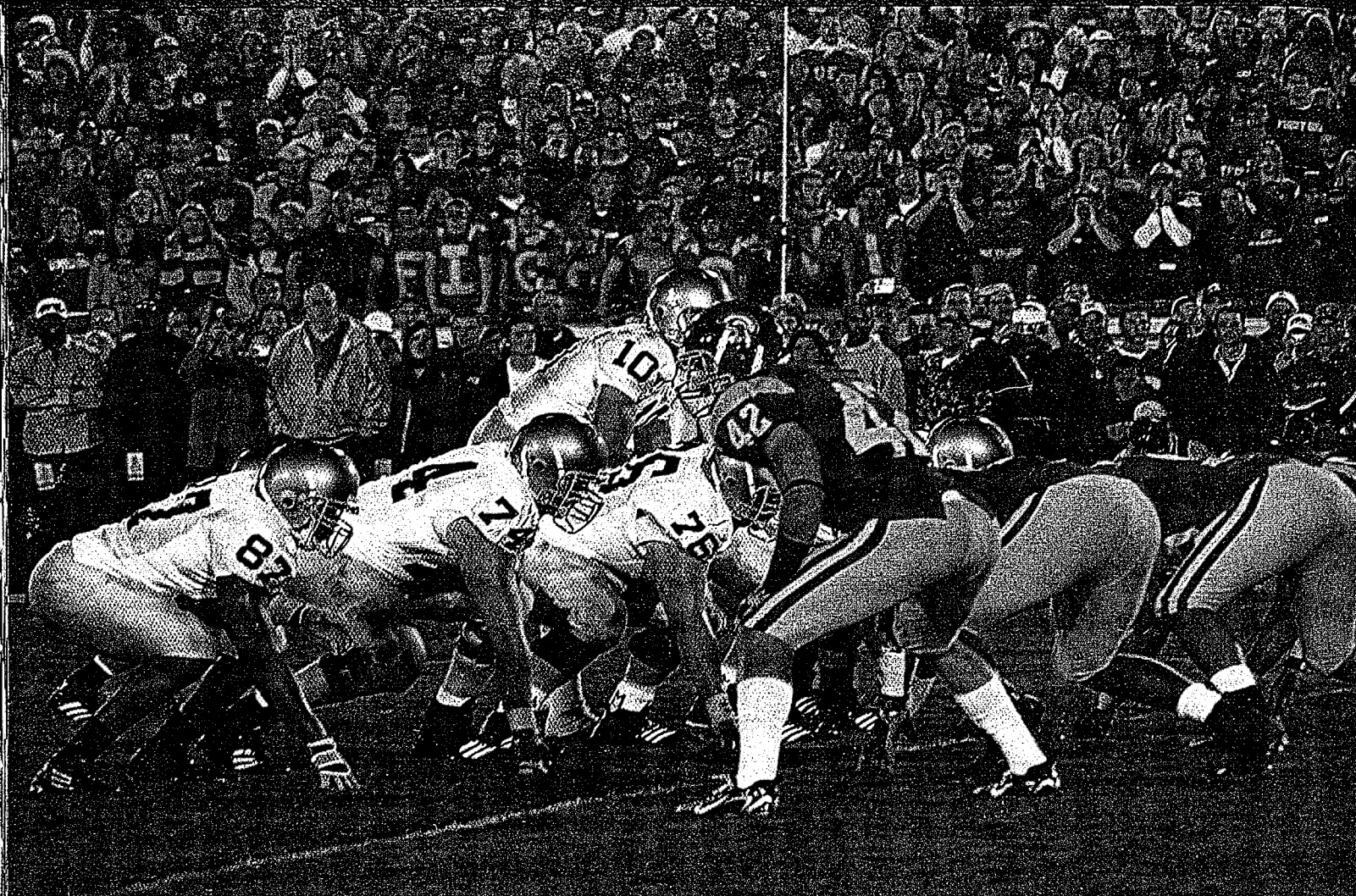
FROM THE PRESS BOX



The Notre Dame-Army rivalry dates all the way back to 1913, when Army agreed to pay Notre Dame's \$1,000 travel bill to play the Irish at West Point. The

Cadets, expecting an easy win, were stunned when Notre Dame quarterback Gus Dorais opened up with a forward pass to Knute Rockne. The Irish won easily, 35-13, and a rivalry was born.

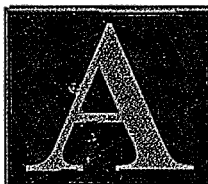
Fifteen years later, Notre Dame beat Army 12-6 in another of the series' most famous games. A win for the injury-depleted Notre Dame squad seemed impossible against the Cadets, who had won six straight, until Rockne delivered the most famous speech in college football. The team responded and rallied late in the game to win one for the Gipper.



COMING UP SHORT The Notre Dame offense struggled to put points on the board in the first half, falling behind 21-10.

Trojan Trouncing

USC 44 Notre Dame 24



David Poell

fter last year's heart-breaker, revenge was to be a dish best served in L.A.

A mere 13 months after the Trojans' heralded 34-31 comeback victory over the Irish in front of a stunned crowd at Notre Dame Stadium, "vengeance" remained the buzzword on the minds of every Notre Dame fan, coach and player in the L.A. Coliseum that balmy November evening.

The game began auspiciously enough for the Irish. Starting out with decent field position on their own 32-yard line, quarterback Brady Quinn completed a 38-yard pass to wide receiver Rhema McKnight on the first play to move

Notre Dame into USC territory. Yet after the first big play of the game, the drive stalled. Instead of letting place kicker Carl Gioia attempt a field goal from the USC 29, the Irish elected to go for the first down on fourth and nine, a pass from Quinn to McKnight that fell incomplete.

After taking over, the Trojan offense wasted no time picking apart a highly vulnerable Irish secondary. Led by rookie quarterback John David Booty, the Trojans engineered an eight-play, 71-yard touchdown drive in which Booty completed four of five passes, including a 9-yard bullet to wide receiver Dwayne Jarrett in the endzone.

Unfortunately for Notre Dame, the much-needed sense of urgency failed to materialize. After gaining a mere five

yards on the ensuing possession, Irish punter Geoff Price kicked a paltry 37-yard punt to Trojan returner Desmond Reed, who ran the ball back 43 yards to the Notre Dame 26-yard line. Booty picked up right where he left off, completing a 25-yard pass to wide receiver Steve Smith and then another touchdown pass to the All-American Jarrett. Midway through the first quarter, the Trojans had already jumped out to a 14-0 lead.

On their next possession, the Irish offense finally managed to generate a sustained drive that put points on the scoreboard. Starting at their own 20-yard line, Quinn marched the Irish down the field to the USC 9. Despite having a first and goal deep inside Trojan territory, the Irish failed to penetrate the endzone and were forced to settle for a 27-yard Gioia

LA Memorial Coliseum

Attendance: 91,800

All-Time Series: 42-31-5

	1	2	3	4	FINAL
ND	3	7	7	7	24
USC	14	7	7	16	44

KEY STATS

	ND	USC
Total Offensive Yards	404	404
Possession Time	30:53	29:07
Interceptions Number-Yds-TD	2-0-0	0-0-0
Punts-Yards	3-117	3-67
Red-Zone Scores-Chances	4-5	5-5

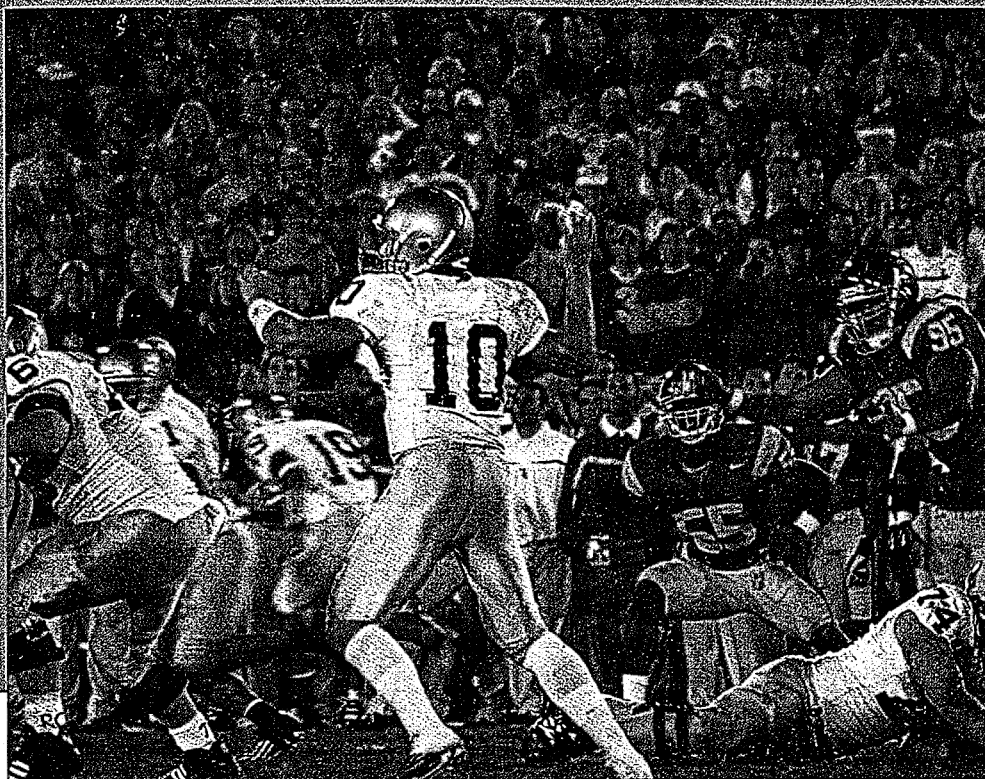
KEY PERFORMANCES:

Brady Quinn: 22-45, 274 Yards, 3 TDs,
88 Yards Rushing

Rhema McKnight: 6 Receptions, 109 Yards, 1 TD

Mike Richardson: 9 Tackles, 1 INT

Terrail Lambert: 3 Tackles, 1 INT



FIGHT ON Despite a nearly insurmountable deficit and questionable health, Brady Quinn kept throwing late in the game.

FROM THE PRESS BOX



The USC game marked the first road game loss for second-year Head Coach Charlie Weis, who entered the contest with an 8-0 all-time road record. Weis' 8-

0 record was the longest unbeaten streak on the road to start a Notre Dame coaching career since Frank Leahy amassed a 9-0-1 record to begin his career. The school record for consecutive road wins stands at 11, a mark set twice by Leahy. Notre Dame first won 11 straight road games from Sept. 28, 1946, to Nov. 6, 1948, and completed this feat again from Nov. 22, 1952, to Oct. 7, 1955.

field goal, cutting down the USC lead to 11 points by the end of the first quarter.

Led by a balanced air and ground assault, the Trojan offense once again manhandled the Irish defensive line and secondary to drive down the field for its third touchdown in as many possessions and take a commanding 21-3 lead. Mercifully for Notre Dame, this USC touchdown would be the Trojans' last points of the half as momentum began to shift. After the USC defense forced Darius Walker to fumble on the USC 7-yard line, putting the potent offense back on the field, the Irish defense showed its first signs of life in the form of a blocked punt by defender Steve Quinn. It took only one play for Brady Quinn to connect with Irish wide receiver Marcus Freeman in the endzone to cut the USC lead to 21-10.

The story of the rest of the half was the sudden inefficiency of Booty and the failure of the Irish offense to capitalize on two USC turnovers. On the first play of the next USC possession, Irish cornerback Mike Richardson intercepted a pass from Booty at the Notre Dame 48-yard line, but the offense once again stalled and turned the ball over on downs. Booty threw another interception on this possession, this time to defensive back Trevor Laws, but the Irish again failed to gain a first down and turned the ball over on downs in USC territory. After the game, Notre Dame Head Coach Charlie Weis voiced his frustration. "We didn't win on special teams. We didn't win on offense. We didn't win on defense," Weis said.

When the Trojans began the second half with another impressive touchdown

drive, the tone of the rest of the game was firmly set. After missing the window of opportunity opened by the two interceptions, Notre Dame failed to threaten the USC lead in the second half, which never fell below 11 points. For the rest of the night, Booty and the Trojan offense showcased their superior speed against an overmatched Irish defense, a mismatch that Quinn and the offense could not overcome. After cutting the lead to 37-24 with three and a half minutes left in the game, USC kick returner Brian Cushing returned a Notre Dame onside kick 42 yards for a touchdown to make the final score 44-24. It was the third consecutive game for the Irish at the Coliseum in which they gave up more than 40 points to the mighty Trojans.

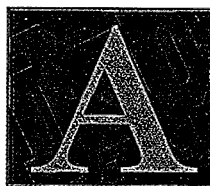
6



SOUR FINISH LSU's offensive line dominated the Irish all game long, giving quarterback JaMarcus Russell time to complete his passes.

Tiger Bait

SUGAR BOWL: LSU 41 Notre Dame 14

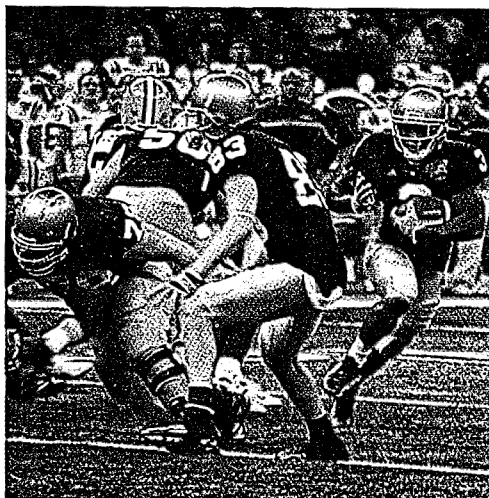


Megan Teigen

fter a 2005 season in which the Irish became known for their strong starts, Notre Dame struggled in 2006 and often came out flat. Despite Head Coach Charlie Weis' adjustments to their bowl game preparations, the Irish continued this trend in the season's final game, allowing LSU to jump to an early 14-0 lead that Notre Dame would never overcome.

The Irish knew they needed to score early to avoid a record ninth straight bowl loss. Instead, they gained only 14 yards on their opening drive, hindered by a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty after receiver Jeff Samardzija caught a first-down pass and flipped the

football to his defender. Weis called for a fake punt on fourth and three, looking



NOWHERE TO RUN Running back Darius Walker had a big first half but was held to just three yards in the second.

to generate some momentum and avoid yet another slow start in a big game. But Travis Thomas was stopped short, and two plays later LSU found the endzone.

Notre Dame's second drive also stalled, and this time Geoff Price punted the ball away. The Tigers marched 80 yards in three and a half minutes for their second straight touchdown and a 14-0 lead.

After the LSU score, the Irish began to show some life, responding with an 80-yard drive of their own that ended with a 24-yard touchdown catch by David Grimes. On the following LSU possession, Travis Leitko recovered a fumble by JaMarcus Russell on the LSU 21-yard line. Notre Dame failed to capitalize, however, and the teams traded possessions — and missed field goals — for much of the second quarter.

Louisiana Superdome

Attendance: 77,781

All-Time Series: 5-5-0

KEY STATS

ND

LSU

First Downs

17

31

Total Offensive Yards

291

577

Interceptions: Number-Yds-TD

1-20-0

2-39-0

Possession Time

28:14

31:46

Net Yards Passing

148

332

1 2 3 4 FINAL

ND 7 7 0 0 14

LSU 14 7 13 7 41

KEY PERFORMANCES:

Darius Walker: 22 Carries, 128 Yards
 Brady Quinn: 15-35, 148 Yards, 2 TDs, 2 INTs
 Jeff Samardzija: 8 Receptions, 59 Yards, 1 TD



QUICK ON HIS FEET The Irish defense could not hold on against LSU receiver Early Doucet and the rest of the Tiger offense.

With just under three minutes left in the half, Darius Walker broke free for consecutive runs of 35 and 15 yards, and Brady Quinn found Samardzija for a 10-yard touchdown to tie the score at 14.

The Tigers retaliated quickly. Russell's 58-yard pass to Early Doucet set up Russell's first rushing touchdown of the season from five yards out. The last-minute score was disappointing, but the Irish headed to the locker room still confident they could play with a bigger and speedier LSU team.

"I felt in the locker room at halftime that things were calm and under control," Weis said. "I saw no signs that we would play a completely crummy second half."

But after putting up 262 yards of offense and dominating time of possession in the first half, the Irish fell apart. The offense

saw the field for only eight minutes and 43 seconds of the game's final 30 minutes, gaining only 30 yards and failing to score in the second half, while the defense allowed 333 second-half yards and 20 more points. Walker, whose 125 yards rushing led Notre Dame's first-half comeback, was held to just three yards for the rest of the game. Quinn, after throwing for 124 first-half yards, added only 24 after halftime.

It was the Tigers who controlled the clock in the second half, and Notre Dame simply couldn't get anything going. On the opening drive of the third quarter, senior cornerback Ambrose Wooden forced a fumble at the LSU 32-yard line. He appeared to recover it, but the call was overturned after review. LSU went on to kick a field goal, going up 34-14.

FROM THE PRESS BOX



The last time Notre Dame and LSU met was in the 1997 Sugar Bowl. The two

teams played each other twice in six weeks that season, with very different outcomes. The first game went Notre Dame's way as a 5-5 Irish team scored 17 points in the first quarter to upset then-No. 11 LSU 24-6. LSU fell to No. 15, while the Irish went on to win their last two games of the season and gain a berth to the Sugar Bowl. This time, however, the score was reversed as LSU beat the Irish 27-9. It was the first and only time since 1901, when the Irish played two games against the South Bend Athletic Club, that Notre Dame faced the same team twice in one season.

Senior cornerback Mike Richardson intercepted a pass by Russell early in the fourth quarter, but the offense went three and out, and the Tigers responded with their final touchdown of the night, making the final score 41-14.

Quinn had season-low passing numbers, finishing the game 15-of-35 for 148 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions. After the game, however, Weis was quick to blame himself first. "I'm gonna have to do a better job," he said. "We can't be 10-3, going to a bowl game and getting our clocks cleaned." **9**



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PIANO TRIO
FRI, FEB 23 AT 8 PM

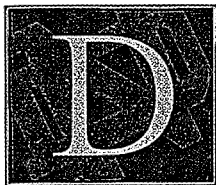


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Fifth-Year Frenzy

David Poell



Despite the departure of several standout senior players following this season, including Brady Quinn, Jeff Samardzija, Rhema McKnight and Victor Abiamiri, there will still be several familiar faces from this year's senior class on the sidelines next September. Three weeks ago, Notre Dame Head Coach Charlie Weis announced that nine players from the senior class will be applying for a fifth year of eligibility. Here, *Scholastic* breaks down each player's 2006 stats and previews what the returning fifth years hope to bring to an Irish squad that will be relatively young for the 2007-2008 season:

#9 Captain Tom Zbikowski (Defensive Back)

After gaining national prominence as both a potent kick return threat and a hard-hitting defensive back in 2005, Zbikowski had a relatively tame year in 2006. Despite recording 79 tackles for the season (third on the team), Zbikowski's inclusion in a lackluster secondary damaged his national standing and highlighted his inability to effectively cover lightning-fast receivers from powerhouses like Michigan, USC and LSU. Hopefully the infusion of new defensive coordinator Corwin Brown will reenergize next year's defense in a way that allows Zbikowski to return to the bruising form he showcased so well in 2005.

#26 Captain Travis Thomas (Linebacker/Running Back)

Emerging as a dual threat as both a linebacker and running back this year, Travis Thomas will return next season as a valuable asset to the Irish squad. Playing in 11 games during the 2006 season, Thomas recorded a total of 35 tackles and cemented his place as one of the most improved players on the team this year. His return next year will provide a solid foundation for Brown's new defensive schemes.

#89 John Carlson (Tight End)

After last year's departure of tight end Anthony Fasano to the Dallas Cowboys, many thought that Notre Dame would be at a disadvantage in the tight end position this season. Any such fears went for naught, as senior John Carlson stepped up to become one of Quinn's favorite passing targets. Despite missing two games due to injury at the end of the season, Carlson started all 11 games he played in this year and recorded 47 receptions for a total of 634 yards. With the loss of Samardzija and McKnight, Carlson will have the most receiving yards of any returning player next year.

#78 John Sullivan (Offensive Lineman)

A veteran at the center position, Sullivan's decision to stay an extra year will be a welcome addition to an offensive line that will lose three of its five starters. With the departure of Bob Morton, Ryan Harris and Dan Santucci, Sullivan will be the clear leader on the offensive line. Freshman quarterback Jimmy Clausen will benefit from Sullivan's breadth of experience on offense and his ever-imposing 6'4", 290-pound frame.

#98 Trevor Laws (Defensive Line)

Having established himself as one of the most effective defensive linemen for the Irish, Laws will return next year for his third consecutive year as a starter. In 2006, Laws finished the season fifth on the team in tackles, with a total of 62. Laws will look to continue his strong leadership on the defensive line next year, which will see four of seven starters returning.

#57 Dwight Stephenson, Jr. (Defensive Line)

With the departure of seniors Abiamiri, Derek Landri and Chris Frome, Stephenson will look to compete for a starting position on the defensive line. Stephenson has been primarily a reserve player for the last few years and has yet to see any prolonged action in a game-day setting. Stephenson hails from Boca Raton, Fla., and is the son of NFL Hall of Fame center Dwight Stephenson of the Miami Dolphins.

#52 Joe Brockington (Linebacker)

Predominantly a special teams regular for the Irish the previous two years, Brockington reinvented himself this year at the linebacker position. Playing in all 13 games, Brockington finished the season as the sixth most proficient tackler for the Irish, with a total of 59 tackles. Next year Brockington will benefit from the return of fellow linebackers Maurice Crum and Travis Thomas, as well as the addition of a new defensive coordinator who will try to improve a defense that finished 45th in the nation this year in yards allowed per game (320.5).

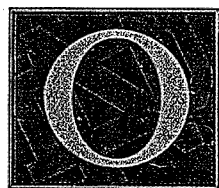
#22 Ambrose Wooden (Defensive Back)

Ambrose Wooden entered the season with a starting position in the Notre Dame secondary, but any expectations he had that 2006 would be a banner year dissipated after he suffered a concussion during the Michigan game. In Wooden's absence, Terrail Lambert filled in for the Michigan State game and essentially won the thriller for the Irish thanks to two late interceptions. Wooden played intermittently for the rest of the season but never gained back his starting position. It will be interesting to see how new defensive coordinator Brown uses Wooden next year.

#17 Geoff Price (Punter)

Perhaps one of the most welcome additions to the Irish this year, Price established himself as the Notre Dame starting punter and one of the greatest at his position in the nation. During a year when both the offense and defense suffered from extended periods of frustration and inefficiency, Price was the team's model of consistency throughout the season. Price punted 50 times and averaged an impressive 45.4 yards per kick, which put him at eighth place among punters nationwide. For all the uncertainty surrounding Notre Dame next season, there will be little to worry about at the punting position. 9

Should I Stay or Should I Go?



Christopher Meskill

In January 3, Notre Dame lost more than had been predicted. Head Coach Charlie Weis was adamant that the team needed to stay loose and have some fun in the Sugar Bowl, the last game for team leaders like Brady Quinn and Jeff Samardzija. But it is difficult to focus on having fun when so much is at stake — the longest bowl losing streak in collegiate football history, the legacy of the senior class and, what no one had predicted, the last game of Darius Walker's college career. As the football team was embarrassed for the third time this season in the bowl game against LSU, Walker stood out as the only successful facet of the offense — much to the chagrin of the analysts who said Notre Dame was a "pass only" offense. Walker rushed for 128 yards on 22 carries and also made two receptions for 30 yards. It was the perfect showcase opportunity for the junior tailback, who is eyed by NFL scouts as a third-and-long situational back.

A week after the debacle in New Orleans, Walker made his intentions known to his coach, teammates and the rest of the Notre Dame community. On January 11, Walker held a press conference to declare for the NFL draft. "I've been playing football since I was five years old, started out peewee, a little boy at five," Walker said. "So I know forever my dream was to play pro and to go to the NFL. And thankfully, with the blessing of God, that opportunity has permitted me now."

So now, the question remains — did Walker make the right decision? With one more year of eligibility remaining and another year under Charlie Weis' tutelage forgone, most analysts have said that Walker is setting himself up for disappointment in the 2007 draft. However, considering all of the factors affecting the NFL draft and Notre Dame football, I firmly believe that Walker has made the right decision.

First, the running back situation at Notre Dame will be much more competitive next year. Walker would

probably not enjoy the same opportunities as an every-down back next season, with James Aldridge's health improving. Also, with the recruitment of linebacker talent, Travis Thomas, who applied for a fifth year at Notre Dame, would probably be transferred to the backfield. Meanwhile, highly touted high school running back prospect Armando Allen has committed to Notre Dame. As it stands Walker would likely split time with these other halfbacks and would not be given the same consideration by NFL scouts as he will coming out of this year.

Second, Walker is facing the "Matt Leinart dilemma" concerning entrance into the draft after junior year. Leinart, the Heisman-winning quarterback from USC, decided to stay with the Trojans for his senior season following a national championship junior campaign. However, he enjoyed less success his senior season and was supplanted at the top of the draft by fellow teammate Reggie Bush, as well as Rose Bowl adversary Vince Young. If Leinart had declared after his junior season, he would have been the first selection instead of NFL flop Alex Smith.

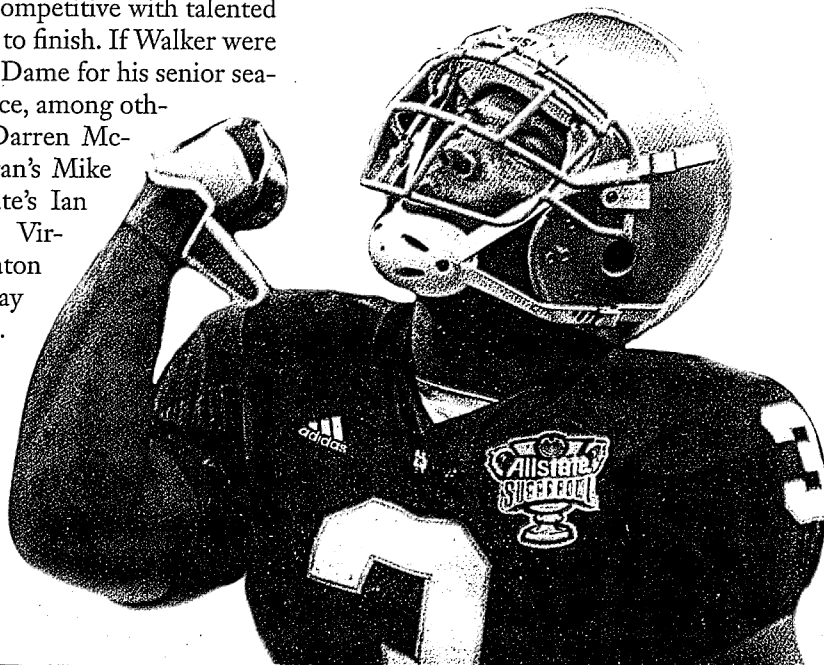
Like Leinart, Walker has a relatively weak draft class following his junior season. This year's draft will feature talented backs such as Oklahoma's Adrian Peterson and California's Marshawn Lynch. However, this year's class is top heavy, with lesser backs constituting the rest of the available talent. Next year's class will be much more competitive with talented backs from start to finish. If Walker were to stay at Notre Dame for his senior season, he would face, among others, Arkansas' Darren McFadden, Michigan's Mike Hart, Boise State's Ian Johnson, West Virginia's Steve Slaton and Rutgers' Ray Rice in the draft.

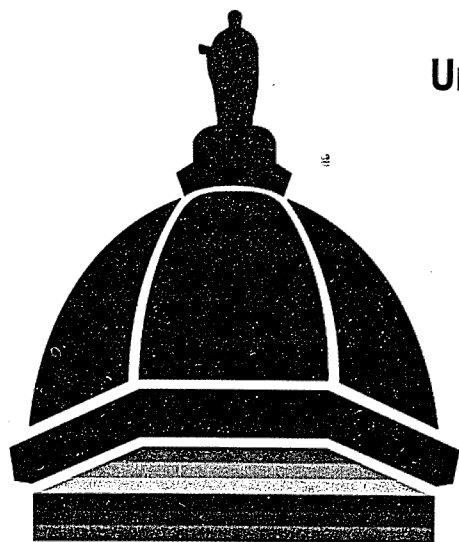
Last, Walker is doing what is right for Notre Dame. With the departure of so much of the

offense, the Fighting Irish will undergo a rebuilding season under Jimmy Clausen, Demetrius Jones and James Aldridge. To build team chemistry for the future, it is best for Notre Dame to transition into this new system and get established as soon as possible. If Walker were to stay Weis would feel some obligation to adhere to his old offensive patterns. In order for Notre Dame to make that last step to be a national power like USC and Ohio State, they need to incorporate a scheme that utilizes their younger, highly recruited talent.

By all measures, Walker has done the right thing for himself and for Notre Dame, and all signs indicate that he will graduate with a degree from the university. Reflecting on his career, fans will always remember him as a Notre Dame man from start to finish. From the glorious win over Michigan that he fought for in his very first game to the pure heart he put forth in his last contest, Darius Walker has done great things for Notre Dame. As he enters the draft this spring, I, for one, wish him the best of luck in his future endeavors. I only hope that he continues to represent Notre Dame after college as he did during his time in South Bend.

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Scholastic.





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University Resources for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Questioning Students

The Core Council for Gay and Lesbian Students
(Information, education, and resources)

Contact: Sr. Sue Dunn, OP, 1-5550, or Andy Magee,
amagee@nd.edu

Office of Campus Ministry

(Annual retreat for gay/lesbian/questioning students
and their friends; pertinent library resources
in 304 Co-Mo; discussion and support)

Contact: Fr. Joe Carey, CSC, at 1-7800

University Counseling Center

(Individual counseling)

Contact: Dr. Maureen Lafferty at Lafferty.3@nd.edu

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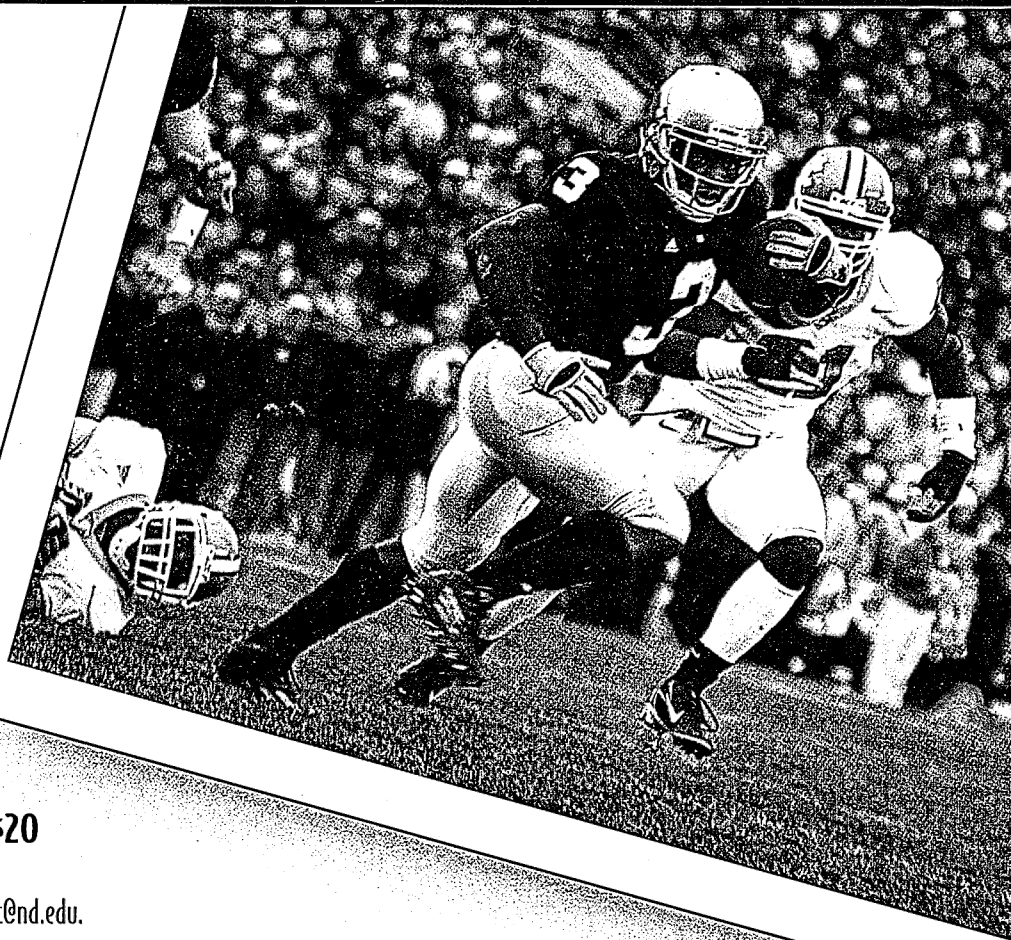
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SEASON STATISTICS

	NOTRE DAME	OPPONENTS
SCORING	403	310
Points Per Game	31.0	23.8
FIRST DOWNS	280	241
Rushing	103	110
Passing	157	111
Penalty	20	20
RUSHING YARDAGE	1634	1779
Yards Gained Rushing	1941	2160
Yards Lost Rushing	307	381
Rushing Attempts	423	468
Average Per Rush	3.9	3.8
Average Per Game	125.7	136.8
TDs Rushing	14	11
PASSING YARDAGE	3433	2644
Att-Comp-Int	471-290-7	339-187-11
Average Per Pass	7.3	7.8
Average Per Catch	11.8	14.1
Average Per Game	264.1	203.4
TDs Passing	37	24
TOTAL OFFENSE	5067	4423
Total Plays	894	807
Average Per Play	5.7	5.5
Average Per Game	389.8	340.2
KICK RETURNS-YARDS	45-965	59-1177
PUNT RETURNS-YARDS	23-169	21-242
INT RETURNS-YARDS	11-100	7-146
KICK RETURN AVERAGE	21.4	19.9
PUNT RETURN AVERAGE	7.3	11.5
INT RETURN AVERAGE	9.1	20.9
FUMBLES-LOST	13-7	14-8
PENALTIES-YARDS	87-695	79-695
Average Per Game	53.5	53.5
PUNTS-YARDS	51-2309	59-2449
Average Per Punt	45.3	41.5
Net Punt Average	37.8	35.6
TIME OF POSSESSION/	30:35	29:25
GAME		
3RD-DOWN	70/177	55/160
CONVERSIONS		
3rd-Down Pct	40%	34%
4TH-DOWN	19/33	7/19
CONVERSIONS		
4th-Down Pct	58%	37%
SACKS BY-YARDS	31-230	31-216
MISC. YARDS	106	0
TOUCHDOWNS SCORED	55	40
FIELD GOALS-ATTEMPTS	8-13	12-18
PAT-ATTEMPTS	49-54	34-39
ATTENDANCE	565,565	278,040
Games/Avg Per Game	7/80,795	4/69,510

RUSHING	Att	Net	Avg	TD	Long	Avg/G
Walker, Darius	255	1267	5.0	7	39	97.5
Aldridge, James	37	142	3.8	0	13	20.3
Thomas, Travis	13	78	6.0	2	43	7.1
Quinn, Brady	82	71	0.9	2	60	5.5
Prince, Munir	15	21	1.4	0	11	2.1
Schwapp, Asaph	4	15	3.8	0	6	7.5
Lyons, John	2	14	7.0	0	10	14.0
West, George	1	11	11.0	1	11	0.8
Samardzija, Jeff	4	6	1.5	1	5	0.5
McConnell, Ashley	3	6	2.0	0	4	0.5
McKnight, Rhema	1	5	5.0	0	5	0.4
Grimes, David	1	2	2.0	1	2	0.2
Sharpley, Evan	2	0	0.0	0	2	0.0
TEAM	3	-4	-1.3	0	0	-1.3
Total	423	1634	3.9	14	60	125.7
Opponents	468	1779	3.8	11	37	136.8

PASSING	Effic	Att	Cmp	Int	Pct	Yds	TD	Lng
Quinn, Brady	146.66	467	289	7	61.9	3426	37	62
Samardzija, Jeff	0.00	2	0	0	0.0	0	0	0
Sharpley, Evan	79.40	2	1	0	50.0	7	0	7
Total	145.75	471	290	7	61.6	3433	37	62
Opponents	137.55	339	187	11	55.2	2644	24	88

RECEIVING	No	Yds	Avg	TD	Long
Samardzija, Jeff	78	1017	13.0	12	51
McKnight, Rhema	67	907	13.5	15	44
Walker, Darius	56	391	7.0	1	21
Carlson, John	47	634	13.5	4	62
Grimes, David	26	336	12.9	2	36
Freeman, Marcus	9	98	10.9	2	25
Anastasio, Chase	2	21	10.5	0	15
West, George	2	14	7.0	0	9
McConnell, Ashley	2	8	4.0	1	5
Parris, Robby	1	7	7.0	0	7
Total	290	3433	11.8	37	62
Opponents	187	2644	14.1	24	88

FIELD GOALS	FGM	FGA	Pct	Lg	Blk
Gioia, Carl	8	13	61.5	40	0

SCORE BY QTRS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	OT	Total
Notre Dame	92	141	89	81	--	403
Opponents	95	86	55	74	--	310

INTERCEPTIONS	No.	Yds	Avg	TD	Long
Richardson, Mike	4	21	5.2	0	20
Lambert, Terrail	3	27	9.0	1	27
Ndukwe, Chinedum	2	52	26.0	0	51
Crum, Maurice	1	0	0.0	0	0
Laws, Trevor	1	0	0.0	0	0
Total	11	100	9.1	1	51
Opponents	7	146	20.9	2	35

PUNTING	No.	Yds	Avg	Long	In-20	Blkd
Price, Geoff	50	2272	45.4	62	12	0
Quinn, Brady	1	37	37.0	37	0	0
Total	51	2309	45.3	62	12	0
Opponents	59	2449	41.5	73	12	1

PUNT RETURNS	No.	Yds	Avg	TD	Long
Zbikowski, Tom	16	144	9.0	1	52
West, George	4	20	5.0	0	10
Samardzija, Jeff	2	4	2.0	0	2
Quinn, Steve	1	1	1.0	0	1
Total	23	169	7.3	1	52
Opponents	21	242	11.5	0	43

KICK RETURNS	No.	Yds	Avg	TD	Long
Grimes, David	21	514	24.5	0	50
West, George	12	251	20.9	0	33
Walls, Darrin	5	84	16.8	0	28
Zbikowski, Tom	5	107	21.4	0	28
Leitko, Travis	1	9	9.0	0	9
Possley, Nick	1	0	0.0	0	0
Total	45	965	21.4	0	50
Opponents	59	1177	19.9	2	90

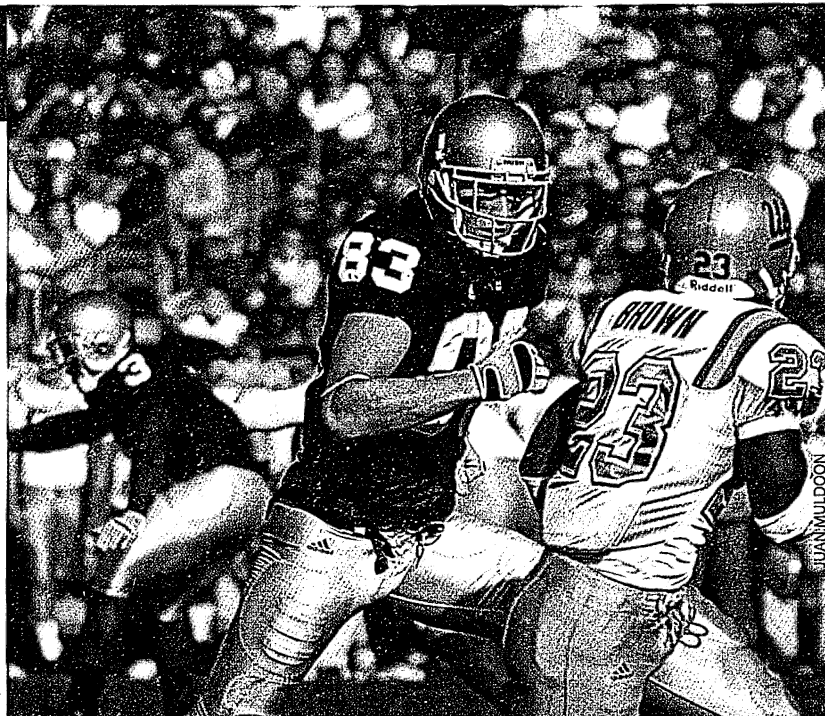
KICKOFFS	No.	Yds	Avg	TB	OB
Burkhart, Ryan	45	2670	59.3	8	0
Renkes, Bobby	22	1351	61.4	5	0
Gioia, Carl	7	282	40.3	0	1
Whitaker, Nate	1	50	50.0	0	0
Total	75	4353	58.0	13	1
Opponents	63	3696	58.7	14	3

FUMBLE RETURNS	No.	Yds	Avg	TD	Long
Zbikowski, Tom	1	25	25.0	1	25
Lambert, Terrail	0	0	0.0	1	0
Total	1	25	25.0	2	25
Opponents	1	54	54.0	1	54

***DENOTES RECORD

DEFENSIVE LEADERS	GP	Tackles				Sacks		Pass Defense			Fumbles		
		Solo	Asst	Total	TFL/Yds	No-Yds	Int-Yds	PBU	Rec-Yds	FF	Saf		
Crum, Maurice	13	47	53	100	10.0-55	4.0-38	1-0	3	0-0	1	0		
Ndukwe, Chinedum	13	58	40	98	3.0-12	1.0-7	2-52	6	1-0	2	0		
Zbikowski, Tom	12	44	35	79	1.0-1	0-0	0-0	2	1-25	1	0		
Landri, Derek	13	34	31	65	15.5-80	7.0-53	0-0	1	0-0	0	0		
Laws, Trevor	13	22	40	62	9.5-40	3.5-24	1-0	1	1-0	1	0		
Brockington, Joe	13	23	36	59	2.0-8	1.0-6	0-0	1	0-0	0	0		
Richardson, Mike	13	34	21	55	6.0-9	0-0	4-21	5	0-0	0	0		
Abiamiri, Victor	13	25	18	43	15.0-88	10.5-73	0-0	0	0-0	2	0		
Lambert, Terrail	13	30	10	40	1.5-9	0.5-6	3-27	1	1-0	1	0		
Thomas, Travis	11	22	13	35	5.0-21	1.0-9	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Frome, Chris	13	10	21	31	1.5-3	0.5-1	0-0	3	0-0	0	0		
Wooden, Ambrose	9	17	4	21	0-0	0-0	0-0	2	0-0	1	0		
Herring, Ray	13	9	9	18	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	1-0	0	0		
Bruton, David	12	12	6	18	1.0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Borsetti, Nick	12	8	6	14	1.0-5	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	1	0		
Cullen, Casey	13	5	6	11	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Talley, Ronald	6	1	10	11	0.5-1	0-0	0-0	0	1-0	0	0		
Thomas, Mitchell	13	5	5	10	0.5-2	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Leitko, Travis	13	6	4	10	1.0-3	0-0	0-0	1	1-0	0	0		
Ferrine, Leo	10	6	3	9	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	2	0		
Smith, Torvan	9	6	3	9	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
McCarthy, Kyle	13	6	3	9	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Quinn, Steve	12	5	3	8	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Kuntz, Pat	12	5	2	7	0.5-3	0.5-3	0-0	0	1-0	0	0		
Brown, Justin	4	1	5	6	1.5-10	1.5-10	0-0	1	0-0	1	0		
Walls, Darrin	8	4	0	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	0-0	0	0		
Carlson, John	11	3	1	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Ryan, John	10	2	2	4	1.0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Brown, Sergio	11	3	1	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
McNeil, Raeshon	11	2	2	4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Price, Geoff	12	2	1	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Freeman, Marcus	13	2	1	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Jabbie, Junior	5	2	0	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Jansen, J.J.	13	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Stephenson, Dwight	1	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Vernaglia, Anthony	8	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Gioia, Carl	13	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Renkes, Bobby	5	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
West, George	13	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Grimes, David	12	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
McKnight, Rhema	13	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Burkhart, Ryan	9	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
TEAM	3	1	0	1	1.0-2	0-0	0-0	0	0-0	0	0		
Total	13	470	396	866	78-355	31-230	11-100	29	8-25	11	0		
Opponents	13	489	362	851	64-301	31-216	7-146	40	7-54	7	0		

ALL PURPOSE	G	Rush	Rec	PR	KOR	IR	Tot	Avg/G
Walker, Darius	13	1267	391	0	0	0	1658	127.5
Samardzija, Jeff	13	6	1017	4	0	0	1027	79.0
McKnight, Rhema	13	5	907	0	0	0	912	70.2
Grimes, David	12	2	336	0	514	0	852	71.0
Carlson, John	11	0	634	0	0	0	634	57.6
West, George	13	11	14	20	251	0	296	22.8
Zbikowski, Tom	12	0	0	144	107	0	251	20.9
Aldridge, James	7	142	0	0	0	0	142	20.3
Freeman, Marcus	13	0	98	0	0	0	98	7.5
Walls, Darrin	8	0	0	0	84	0	84	10.5
Thomas, Travis	11	78	0	0	0	0	78	7.1
Quinn, Brady	13	71	0	0	0	0	71	5.5
Ndukwe, Chinedum	13	0	0	0	0	52	52	4.0
Lambert, Terrail	13	0	0	0	0	27	27	2.1
Richardson, Mike	13	0	0	0	0	21	21	1.6
Anastasio, Chase	11	0	21	0	0	0	21	1.9
Prince, Munir	10	21	0	0	0	0	21	2.1
Schwapp, Asaph	2	15	0	0	0	0	15	7.5
McConnell, Ashley	13	6	8	0	0	0	15	1.1
Lyons, John	1	14	0	0	0	0	14	14.0
Leitko, Travis	13	0	0	0	9	0	9	0.7
Parris, Robby	6	0	7	0	0	0	7	1.2
Quinn, Steve	12	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.1
TEAM	3	-4	0	0	0	0	-4	-1.3
Total	13	1634	3433	169	965	100	6301	484.7
Opponents	13	1779	2644	242	1177	146	5988	460.6



RECORD BREAKING RECEIVER Jeff Samardzija, in two seasons as a starter, set completion, yardage and touchdown records at Notre Dame.

TOTAL OFFENSE	G	Plays	Rush	Pass	Total	Avg/G
Quinn, Brady	13	549	71	3426	3497	269.0
Walker, Darius	13	255	1267	0	1267	97.5
Aldridge, James	7	37	142	0	142	20.3
Thomas, Travis	11	13	78	0	78	7.1
Prince, Munir	10	15	21	0	21	2.1
Schwapp, Asaph	2	4	15	0	15	7.5
Lyons, John	1	2	14	0	14	14.0
West, George	13	1	11	0	11	0.8
Sharpley, Evan	8	4	0	7	7	0.9
Samardzija, Jeff	13	6	6	0	6	0.5
McConnell, Ashley	13	3	6	0	6	0.5
McKnight, Rhema	13	1	5	0	5	0.4
Grimes, David	12	1	2	0	2	0.2
TEAM	3	3	-4	0	-4	-1.3
Total	13	894	1634	3433	5067	389.8
Opponents	13	807	1779	2644	4423	340.2

2006 Schedule and Results

September 2	at Georgia Tech	W	14-10
September 9	PENN STATE	W	41-17
September 16	MICHIGAN	L	47-21
September 23	at Michigan State	W	40-37
September 30	PURDUE	W	35-21
October 7	STANFORD	W	31-10
October 21	UCLA	W	20-17
October 28	vs Navy (Baltimore)	W	38-14
November 4	NORTH CAROLINA	W	45-26
November 11	at Air Force	W	39-17
November 18	ARMY	W	41-9
November 25	at USC	L	44-24
January 3	vs LSU	L	41-14

2007 Schedule

September 1	GEORGIA TECH		
September 8	at Penn State		
September 15	at Michigan		
September 22	MICHIGAN STATE		
September 29	at Purdue		
October 6	at UCLA		
October 13	BOSTON COLLEGE		
October 20	USC		
November 3	NAVY		
November 10	AIR FORCE		
November 17	DUKE		
November 24	at Stanford		

FINAL WORD

by Mike Frank

Frank is the editor of IrishEyes.com, a site that reports on Notre Dame athletics and recruiting.

The 2006 Irish football season ended with a thud as Notre Dame fans watched their beloved Irish suffer two demoralizing blow-out losses at the hands of USC and LSU. What started out as a promising season later turned ugly, and Irish fans were left wondering exactly where this team is heading in the future.

Luckily, Irish fans weren't the only people wondering where this Notre Dame team is headed. Head Coach Charlie Weis also pondered the question, came up with an answer and acted quickly.

All Weis had to do was look at Notre Dame's last two games, contests where the Irish defense surrendered 41 and 44 points against two of the nation's best teams. The alarming defensive numbers are mind-numbing, but the Irish offense also only managed to score a combined total of 14 points in the second half of both games — certainly, stats that show the Irish offense has a way to go as well.

But Weis didn't hesitate in the slightest. He made the hard decision of firing Irish defensive coordinator Rick Minter after two years and awarded the job to up-and-coming defensive guru Corwin Brown. Weis is taking a gamble with Brown, and his ultimate fate could likely be in Brown's hands, but it's a calculated risk to be sure.

Brown will be taking over defensive coordinator duties as a first-time coordinator after coming to South Bend from his last job as defensive backs coach for the New York Jets. Weis knows full well who Corwin Brown is as a man and a coach. Weis tried to hire him initially when he was filling his staff after being named Notre Dame's head man in 2004. Weis is also familiar with Brown as a player since Weis was on the coaching staff for both the Jets and the Patriots when Brown was on the roster as a player for both teams during his NFL career.

Weis tapped into his vast NFL connections to come up with Minter's replacement, so Brown comes highly recommended, but the question will be, can he do the job?

He won't have an easy time turning around Notre Dame's struggling defense in short order. Gone from 2006 are NFL prospects and starting defensive linemen Victor Abiamiri and Derek Landin. Also gone will be starting defensive end Chris Frome. The Irish lose their best cornerback, Mike Richardson, and will also have to break in a new free safety with the departure of two-year starter Chinedum Ndukwe.

Brown and Weis did get some good news when two-year starters, strong safety Tom Zbikowski and defensive tackle Trevor Laws, applied for a fifth year of eligibility and opted to return for the 2007 season. However, replacing three starters along the defensive line and a severe lack of quality depth at all positions will make Brown's job much harder than most anticipate.

Other than Laws, the projected other three starters along the defensive line — Patrick Kuntz, Justin Brown and John Ryan — have very little playing experience and were not highly recruited players coming out of high school.

The Irish secondary will have to replace two starters as mentioned but will also have to find some answers for the 24 passing touchdowns surrendered by the Irish secondary in 2006. This unit also managed just nine interceptions in 13 games, so they didn't make many plays on the ball all year. The Irish could have all three starters at linebacker back, but with the departure of starting halfback Darius Walker to the NFL, many expect senior Travis Thomas to return to running back for 2007.

Unfortunately for Brown, the 2006 Irish defense didn't do anything particularly well. Notre Dame ranked No. 61 in rush defense, allowing 137 rushing yards per game. Having to replace three starters up front likely won't help Brown in fixing that problem. Being ranked No. 90 in pass efficiency defense in 2006 also doesn't give one a lot of hope for the future.

Brown will certainly have his hands full as the cupboard is pretty bare in experienced talent and depth. Consider

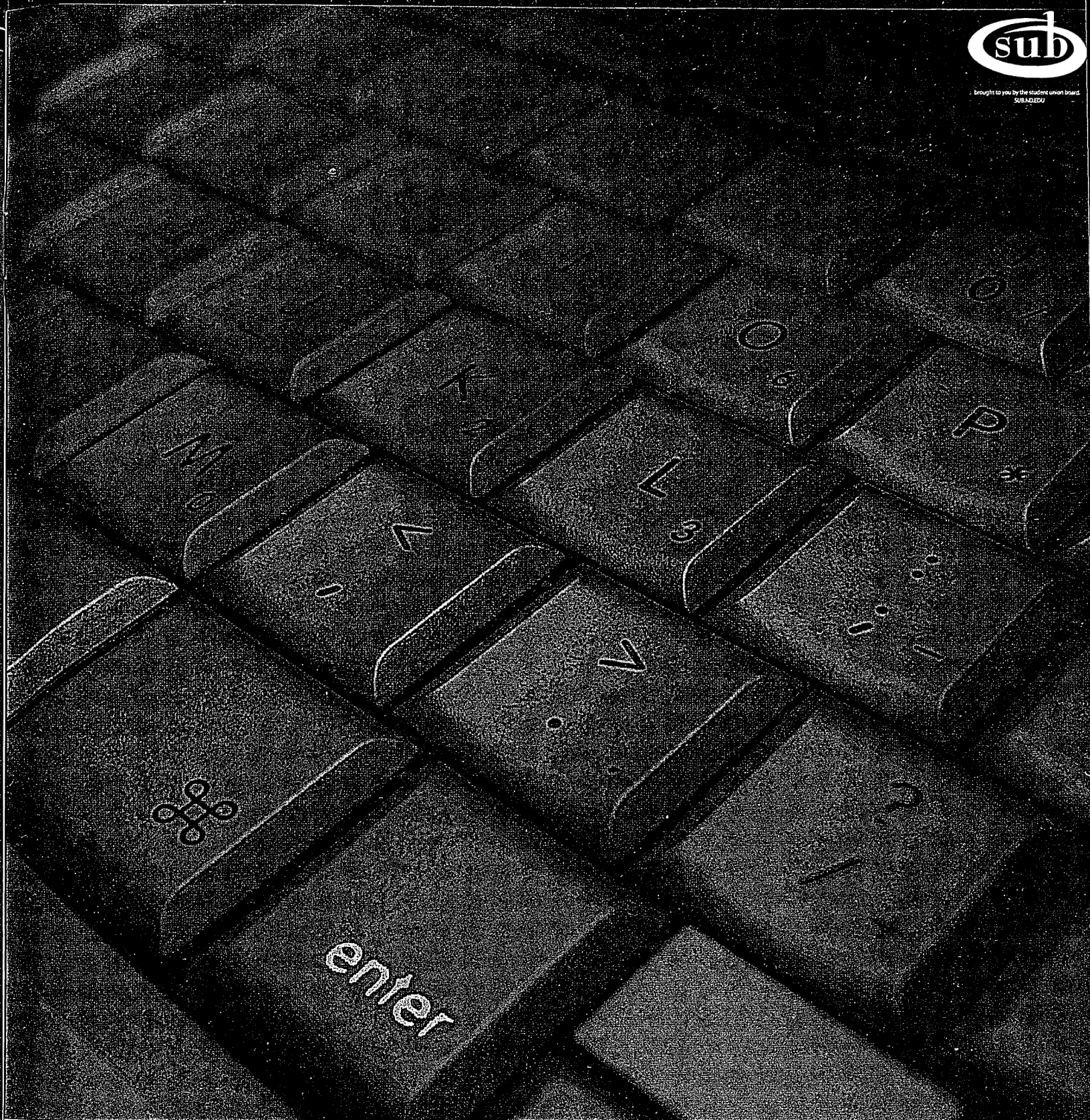
this: the Irish have signed just 23 total defensive players in the past three recruiting classes of '04, '05 and '06 as it stands when writing this article in mid-January. Notre Dame signed 17 offensive recruits in the 2006 class alone. You won't win many championships with defensive recruiting stats like this.

But the defense wasn't the only problem in 2006. The Irish offense, despite having essentially four returning starters along the offensive line, managed to finish ranked No. 72 in the country in rushing, averaging just 125 yards per game.

The Irish will also lose three starters along the offensive line as well as the record-setting passing combo of Brady Quinn, Jeff Samardzija and Rhema McKnight. Halfback Darius Walker opted for the draft after 255 carries amounted for 1,267 rushing yards in 2006 — the next closest running back (James Aldridge) had just 37 rushing attempts all year. The biggest loss will certainly be Quinn, however, who, despite a lackluster rushing attack and being sacked 31 times, threw for 3,426 yards and 37 touchdowns.

Tight end John Carlson and offensive center John Sullivan applied for fifth years and are certain to be back, but replacing three offensive linemen from an average, at best, offensive line usually spells doom. Throw in a brand new starter at quarterback, a new starter at halfback and two new starting wide receivers, and I think it's safe to say that the 2007 squad won't be setting many offensive records.

While the promise of 2006 died a sudden death in the two blow-out losses, the 2007 season could be even more painful to watch. Starting the season playing against seven 2006 bowl participants in the first eight games is just plain nuts, but that's the road Weis and Brown will travel. I think Weis and Brown would be doing well to even win eight games in 2007 considering the talent that needs to be replaced and the talent they'll have on hand for next season. **G**



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