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Navy 23, Notre Dame 21

Home invasion

Navy edges Irish for second straight win in Notre Dame Stadium

By MEAGHAN VESELIK
Sports Writer

Jimmy Clausen set career-highs in pass attempts (51), completions (37) and passing yards (452), and a new school record of completions, Golden Tate made nine catches for 132 yards and a touchdown and Michael Floyd returned to the field for Notre Dame.

The numbers appear to be from a Notre Dame rout, but the Irish were unable to come back against Navy Saturday, falling 23-21. Notre Dame was in contention for a BCS berth heading into Saturday's match-up, but Navy's victory effectively ended that hope. The Irish also fell to 6-3 as the Midshipmen moved to 7-3.

"I think it came down to red-zone production for us," Irish coach Charlie Weis said Saturday afternoon, and he was right. Notre Dame scored on only two of their six chances in the red zone.

As in the Irish style this season, Notre Dame worked on making a comeback with less than a minute left. After the Irish recovered an onside kick, Clausen found Tate for a 31-yard touchdown pass to make the score 23-21 with 24 seconds left in the game. The following onside kick went out of bounds, however, and Navy left South Bend with their second straight win at Notre Dame Stadium.

Navy quarterback Ricky Dobbs passed for 56 yards and rushed for 102 in the game, second to fullback Vince Murray's 158. Going into the game, Weis knew Murray would be a threat.

"Well, I think the first thing you have to do is stop the fullback," Weis said. "That's where the whole defense starts, with stopping the fullback. He had too many yards, some of them easy yards, and he had a couple of big runs."

Where Notre Dame did outdo Navy was in game stats, including going the entire game without once punting.

On top of Clausen's impressive career highs in attempts, completions and passing yards, he had one interception and threw for two touchdowns. His 452 passing yards



VANESSA GEMPIS/The Observer

Irish sophomore wide receiver Michael Floyd reaches for the ball in the fourth quarter of Notre Dame's 23-21 loss to Navy Saturday. The upset loss to the Midshipmen at home was the second in a row for the Irish.

rank as the fourth highest in a single game in Notre Dame history and are the most by an Irish signal caller since Brady Quinn threw for 467 against BYU in 2005.

As good as the Clausen-orchestrated offense was,

Navy's triple-option offense ruled the field.

"Their offense did great today and executed their game plan," Clausen said. "I give a lot of credit to defense and

their coach, their all their players."

Tate also put up strong numbers in the game, most coming out of the second half where he had eight catches and 127 of his 132 yards.

Michael Floyd, playing in his first game since breaking his clavicle against Michigan

State on Sept. 19, had 10 receptions for 141 yards and a touchdown, tying his career high in receptions.

Leading the Irish defense Saturday was Brian Smith with 10 tackles, followed by Sergio Brown and Kyle McCarthy with nine and Ian Williams with eight.

Notre Dame could not cross the 50-yard line on its first possession when senior wide receiver Robby Parris fumbled a reception that was recovered by Navy. From there, Dobbs marched the Midshipmen down the field to score and Navy led 7-0.

Despite moving the ball well, Notre Dame failed to score in the first half. Freshman kicker Nick Tausch attempted a field goal from the Navy 24 and missed wide left, leaving Notre Dame still

behind 7-0. The Midshipmen began the second quarter with another touchdown on Murray's 25-yard run to make it 14-0 at halftime.

The Irish finally got on the board with 5:03 left in the third quarter after junior halfback Robert Hughes made it over the goal line for a touchdown. However, Navy responded with one of their own when Dobbs threw a 52-yard pass to junior wide receiver Greg Jones to increase their lead to 21-7.

Sophomore cornerback Robert Blanton apparently thought Jones was an ineligible receiver, and as a result Jones was wide open on the play.

The Irish finally started to rack up points late in the fourth quarter. Floyd caught a

12-yard touchdown pass with 4:46 left to make it 21-14. After a key defensive stop that forced a Navy punt, the Irish started a new drive at their own 13-yard line with time running out. Their success was cut short, however, when Navy sacked Clausen twice, the second time for a safety with a minute left in the game.

Weis felt along the same lines as his players in terms of correcting mistakes and looking ahead. Not only is he prepared to fix his team's mistakes from Saturday, but Weis is also ready to look to next week.

"Right now that's the only thing you are chasing," he said. "You can't be worrying about two or three games down the line, you've got to worry about Pittsburgh at 8 Saturday night."

Ranked Notre Dame teams had defeated unranked Navy teams 41 straight times, a streak dating back to 1936.

Contact Meaghan Veselik at
mvesel01@saintmarys.edu

player of the game

Vince Murray
Navy fullback

Murray gashed the Irish defense for 158 yards and a touchdown, averaging 11.3 yards per carry.

stat of the game

2 of 6

The number of red zone opportunities the Notre Dame offense scored on thanks to turnovers and failed conversions.

play of the game

Craig Schaefer's sack of Jimmy Clausen in the end zone

The safety put Navy ahead 23-14 with 1:00 left and ended any serious hope on a Notre Dame comeback.

quote of the game

"People make mistakes. I mean, this game was a mistake."

Ian Williams
Irish defensive tackle

report card

- B** **quarterbacks:** Jimmy Clausen threw for a career-high 452 yards, but couldn't lead the Irish offense into the end zone often enough and had a critical fumble.
- B** **running backs:** Notre Dame rarely ran the ball against the Midshipmen but Theo Riddick was impressive in his five carries. Robert Hughes never got going on the ground but had 59 receiving yards.
- B+** **receivers:** Golden Tate and Michael Floyd each had more than 100 yards and did their jobs against the Navy corners, although Floyd looked a little rusty at times. Robby Parris' fumble was a huge momentum shift.
- C-** **offensive line:** Against a much smaller Navy defense the line of scrimmage was not controlled, and the two sacks of Clausen came on the most critical plays of the game.
- C** **defensive line:** Vince Murray and Ricky Dobbs gashed the Notre Dame defense early, in particular up the middle. The unit improved as the game went on but struggled early.
- C+** **linebackers:** Brian Smith had a career-high 10 tackles and Harrison Smith had a nice game at linebacker. There seemed to be missed assignments defending the option and Navy had 348 yards rushing.
- C-** **defensive backs:** This unit struggled helping out in run support, although Sergio Brown had nine tackles (but several misses). Greg Jones was uncovered on his huge touchdown catch.
- D-** **special teams:** Nick Tausch missed both field goal attempts after making his last 14. John Goodman was solid returning punts and Theo Riddick had some nice moves on kickoff return duty.
- F** **coaching:** Losing to Navy twice at home is simply unacceptable, and much of the blame for the red zone failures has to go to play-calling. Turnovers, miscommunication and penalties are all signs of a poorly coached team.
- 1.96** **overall:** A disastrous performance for a team that should have soundly beaten Navy.

adding up the numbers

- 73** Years since an unranked Navy team had defeated a ranked Notre Dame team, a streak of 41 consecutive games.
- 4** Number of times the Irish failed to score a point while in the red zone against the Midshipmen.
- 37** Completions for Jimmy Clausen out of 51 attempts, the most in Notre Dame history.
- 2** Field goals missed by Nick Tausch after the freshman kicker had converted a school record 14 straight.
- 160** Passes without an interception for Clausen until Navy linebacker Ram Vela's pick in the fourth quarter.
- 5** Consecutive games with a touchdown reception for receiver Golden Tate.
- 141** Yards for sophomore receiver Michael Floyd in his first game back since breaking his clavicle against Michigan State.
- 0** Number of punts for Notre Dame in the game despite scoring just 21 points.



GRACE KENESEY/The Observer

Notre Dame fans react following Navy's 23-21 upset over the Irish Saturday. Ranked Notre Dame teams had won 41 straight games over unranked Midshipmen squads, a streak dating back to 1936.

Irish caught looking ahead

The players won't say it. The coaches won't say it. Nobody within with the Notre Dame football program is admitting it, but to anyone who follows sports, it's fairly obvious what happened to Notre Dame on Saturday.



Sam Werner

Associate Sports Editor

The Irish fell into the prototypical trap game. Next weekend's showdown in Pittsburgh was supposed to be the make-or-break game. It was all set up perfectly to be two top 20 teams nationally broadcast in primetime.

Except the Irish forgot about that pesky little Navy team that always plays Notre Dame tough. Who could really blame them? Navy had only beaten Notre Dame once in the past 45 years.

Except that one time was two years ago, and many of the players on Notre Dame's roster played in that game. This team, more than any Irish squad of the past half-century, should not have underestimated what Navy was capable of.

The quotes from after the game were eerily reminiscent of the interviews after the loss to Syracuse last season, when the usually fiery Golden Tate said he felt the attitude was "Eh."

"I think it did feel a little flat," Tate said after Saturday's loss. "I'm not sure why. I definitely did feel it, but I'm not sure why we felt that way, why I felt that way."

The worst part of Saturday's loss, though, isn't that it was the second loss to Navy in the past three years, or the fact that this year's junior and senior classes will never see a win against Navy in Notre Dame Stadium during their time as a student.

No, the worst part was that, even though the loss was unexpected, it was hardly shocking.

The Irish had been talking a tightrope all season, and so far had come out on the winning end more often than not.

Saturday, though, all the woes that had haunted the Irish all season showed up once again.

First, the red zone production was abysmal. Including Saturday's game, the Irish have scored touchdowns on only 51 percent of their trips inside the opponent's 20-yard line. On Saturday alone, Notre Dame found points on only two of the six red zone chances.

Next, the run defense, and defense in general, was gashed repeatedly. The Midshipmen rushed for a staggering 348 yards against Notre Dame. A run defense that looked to have improved over the past few weeks regressed back to early-season form.

It would be one thing if the Irish were burned by Navy quarterback Ricky Dobbs or one of the Midshipmen's speedy tailbacks, but the play that seemed to give the Irish fits was a simple dive play to the fullback. Vince Murray led the Midshipmen in rushing, with 158 yards on only 14 carries, almost all of them right up the middle.

Poor tackling, another bugaboo for the Irish all season, showed up in spades Saturday. How many

times did a Navy player appear to be stopped, only to rattle off a few more yards after initial contact.

Against Navy's triple option, it appeared that Notre Dame's struggling pass defense would get a break, and the Midshipmen did pass only three times all day. On one of those passes, though, the Irish got burned for a 52-yard touchdown pass where it appeared the Irish simply neglected to cover the Navy receiver.

On the other side of the ball, the offensive line play was suspect as well. It's one thing to give up pressure when USC is rushing only four defensive linemen, but to give up consecutive sacks — and one safety — to a Navy line that weighs in at an average of just 262.3 pounds is simply unacceptable for a team with legitimate BCS aspirations.

Despite all of this, Notre Dame still had a chance to win. I'll admit that when the Irish regained possession in the waning minutes down only seven, I thought that Jimmy Clausen would lead yet another fourth quarter comeback.

It wasn't to be, though, and the loss obviously raises more questions about Charlie Weis' job security. In all likelihood, those questions won't be answered until the end of the season.

One thing is certain, though. The Irish won't be getting distracted by any BCS talk for the rest of this season.

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

Contact Sam Werner at swerner@nd.edu

Tune in to the Irish Insider podcast at ndsmcobserver.com/podcasts.

Offense fails to convert in red zone



Junior quarterback Jimmy Clausen waits for the snap near the Navy end zone during Saturday's 23-21 loss to the Midshipmen. Notre Dame scored on just two of their six trips into the red zone, which included an interception and a fumble.

By ALEX BARKER
Sports Writer

With the return of Michael Floyd to the lineup after sitting out the last five games because a broken collarbone, Notre Dame's offense looked, at times, unstoppable. But once again, the Irish offense just couldn't get it done when it mattered most.

Jimmy Clausen and company were a horrific 2-for-6 inside the red zone against Navy, including two turnovers and two missed field goals.

In his postgame press conference, Irish coach Charlie Weis acknowledged that his team's poor performance down near the goal line was the difference between winning and losing.

"Getting the ball down into

"Getting the ball down into position to score was not the issue; it was scoring that was the issue."

Charlie Weis
Irish head coach

position to score was not the issue; it was scoring that was the issue," he said.

With the offense sputtering and the defense unable to make stops for much of the game, it seemed as though things couldn't possibly get worse the Irish. They did.

After hitting a Notre Dame record 14 consecutive field goals, kicker Nick Tausch missed his only two attempts against the Midshipmen, tries from 30 and 41 yards.

This would come back to haunt the Irish. After failing to convert on three plays from inside the five-yard line, Weis was faced with a tough choice on fourth-and-goal down 14-0 early in the second quarter. He elected to go for it and the Irish turned the ball over on downs after quarterback

Jimmy Clausen's pass fell incomplete in the end zone.

"We had missed a couple field goals in the game, and sometimes that taints you," Weis said of the decision. "I thought that the possessions in the game, especially they were up two scores, but the two scores were touchdowns, I think the possessions in the game and the time of possession was going to warrant that we were going to need some points."

What really cost the Irish down the stretch were uncharacteristic turnovers that cost them valuable scoring opportunities.

Down by two touchdowns late in the third quarter, the Irish were threatening to close the gap as they made their way down to Navy's nine-yard line. But instead of sliding down or getting out of bounds to avoid contact as he has done all season, Clausen got impatient, taking on a Navy defender inside the two-yard line and fumbling the ball after taking a huge hit.

"I just got hit. A guy made

a good play, and I fumbled the ball," Clausen said of the play.

On the next possession, the Irish once again drove deep into Navy territory before turning the ball over. Clausen's pass, intended for Floyd, who wasn't expecting it, ricocheted off of Floyd's back into the arms of Midshipmen linebacker Ram Vela.

"Yeah, we were trying to get a double cadence and we just miscommunicated," Clausen said. "He was blocking the screen, and I was just trying to throw a slant, and it went off his back and a guy made a good play on it."

As good as Notre Dame's offense is outside of the red zone, it won't matter if its woes in the red zone continue. Next week doesn't figure to be any easier as the Irish travel to take on a Pittsburgh defense that is allowing just 17 points per game.

Contact Michael Bryan at mbryan@nd.edu

scoring summary

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total
Navy	7	7	7	2	23
Notre Dame	0	0	7	14	21

First quarter

Navy 7, Notre Dame 0
Ricky Dobbs 1-yd run (Joe Buckley kick) with 7:15 remaining.
Drive: 12 plays, 51 yards, 6:08 elapsed.

Second quarter

Navy 14, Notre Dame 0
Vince Murray 25-yd run (Buckley kick) with 14:56 remaining.
Drive: 7 plays, 76 yards, 2:54 elapsed.

Third quarter

Navy 14, Notre Dame 7
Robert Hughes 1-yd run (Nick Tausch kick) with 5:03 remaining.
Drive: 10 plays, 80 yards, 3:57 elapsed.

Navy 21, Notre Dame 7
Greg Jones 52-yd pass from Dobbs (Buckley kick) with 3:29 remaining.
Drive: 3 plays, 72 yards, 1:34 elapsed.

Fourth quarter

Navy 21, Notre Dame 14
Michael Floyd 12-yd pass from Jimmy Clausen (Tausch kick) with 4:46 remaining.
Drive: 9 plays, 90 yards, 1:48 elapsed.

Navy 23, Notre Dame 14
Clausen tackled by Craig Schaefer in end zone for a safety

Navy 23, Notre Dame 21
Golden Tate 31-yd pass from Clausen (Tausch kick) with 0:24 remaining.
Drive: 3 plays, 66 yards, 0:36 elapsed.

statistics

total yards

ND	512
NA	404

rushing yards

ND	60
NA	348

passing yards

ND	452
NA	56

return yards

ND	114
NA	31

time of possession

ND	27:41
NA	32:19

passing			
Clausen	37-51-452	Dobbs	2-3-56
rushing			
Riddick	5-35	Murray	14-158
Hughes	7-22	Dobbs	31-102
Floyd	1-8	Teich	5-52
Tate	2-3	Greene	5-36
receiving			
Floyd	10-141	Jones	1-52
Tate	9-132	Greene	1-4
Hughes	6-59		
Parris	5-28		
Ragone	2-33		

Notes: Rudolph's injury status unknown

By MEAGHAN VESELIK
Sports Writer

♦Sophomore tight end Kyle Rudolph left Saturday's game in the second half with what trainers initially thought was a broken collarbone. Irish coach Charlie Weis said Sunday that initial x-rays came back negative and the medical staff was still evaluating him.

"They x-rayed him and that came back negative," Weis said. "He went out and walked out of the locker room with a sling, but I don't know what the status of that is yet."

♦Weis also said Sunday that sophomore quarterback Dayne Crist's surgery on his ACL went very well Friday.

"It went very, very well, better than we would have expected. Usually when you get an ACL there's a lot of residual damage along with that, and it was as clean as could be. There was no cartilage, no other ligaments, no bone," Weis said. "It only took about an hour to fix, and the prognosis is very good, probably a time frame faster than we normally would have expected based off of how little damage there was."

♦Clausen's 37 completions against the Midshipmen easily beat the previous record of 33, set by Joe Theismann against USC in 1970 and Brady Quinn against Michigan State in 2005. The junior's 452 passing yards were the most since Quinn

threw for 467 against BYU in 2005.

♦The loss dropped Weis's record against teams with winning records to 8-19. Weis is also just 1-13 against teams ranked the in the top 25.

♦Irish defensive players had different reactions to giving up 348 yards on the ground to Navy. "They out-schemed us, they just played harder," said junior defensive tackle Ian Williams. "I played my heart out, but I guess they just had a better scheme than we did."

Senior safety Kyle McCarthy indicated the failure was more in execution than the scheme.

"We have drilled all week that we have to take care of the fullback. That was a big part of

our game plan and I guess we just didn't execute it," McCarthy said. "We made any adjustments that we felt we needed, and Navy just beat us; there is really no excuse."

Weis sided with McCarthy when asked about the question Sunday.

"I did hear quite contrasting answers to the same question. I think that question was presented to Ian, it was also presented to Kyle McCarthy, and from what I understand, Kyle McCarthy's answer was quite different, where he said it had nothing to do with the scheme," Weis said. "So there's a reason why one guy is a captain and one guy is not."

Contact Meaghan Veselik at mvesel01@saintmarys.edu



VANESSA GEMPIS/The Observer

Too little too late

Notre Dame had no trouble moving the ball against the Midshipmen, never even punting. But as soon as the Irish were near the Navy end zone, everything that could go wrong did go wrong. A failed fourth-down attempt, a fumble at the two-yard line, two missed field goals and an interception off the back of Michael Floyd all dismantled Notre Dame drives that looked as if they would result in scores. The Midshipmen rushed for 348 yards, gashing the Irish up the middle and often pitching to uncovered backs. Despite numerous miscues, Notre Dame still had a chance to force overtime in the closing minutes. This time, however, there was no dramatic comeback, as Clausen was sacked on third and fourth downs to preserve the Navy win. A late onside kick recovery and touchdown pass from Jimmy Clausen to Golden Tate gave a glimmer of hope, but with the loss Notre Dame's BCS chances went down the drain.

For more photos, check out the photo gallery at ndsmcobserver.com



VANESSA GEMPIS/The Observer



VANESSA GEMPIS/The Observer



COLEMAN COLLINS/The Observer



COLEMAN COLLINS/The Observer

Clockwise from top: Sophomore defensive tackle Ethan Johnson leaps in effort to block a Navy field goal, freshman running back Theo Riddick races downfield, junior defensive tackle Ian Williams is upended trying to block a punt, sophomore wide receiver Michael Floyd runs after a reception, senior receiver Robby Parris fumbles.