

# IRISH INSIDER

Friday, November 13, 2009

THE  
OBSERVER

KYLE  
McCARTHY IS...

'THE OLDER  
GUY BACK THERE'

Photo and Graphic Illustration by Ian Gavlick and Andrea Archer



## COMMENTARY

# Irish need win to regain stability

There may not be a more important game in years in impacting the stability of the Notre Dame football program.

What was once a promising season with realistic BCS goals was turned upside down last week with a crushing loss to Navy. And while the Irish have lost three games by a total of 13 points this year, many have already written it off as a failure.

It's been an odd season to be sure — nine games in it's still very hard to tell if this team is good, bad, lucky or somewhere in between. Statistically Notre Dame is 13 points from being undefeated, and also 17 points from being 2-7.

But Saturday, Notre Dame has a chance to reverse a majority of the negativity built up by the loss to the Midshipmen. While losing to an unranked Navy team while ranked for the first time since FDR was president will sting for a long time, it could be just a bump in the road if the Irish can beat Pittsburgh and finish 9-3.

It was my freshman year when Charlie Weis and Notre Dame firmly stated that 9-3 wasn't good enough. Three unexpected years later, 9-3 suddenly is good enough. Not anywhere near good enough to accomplish the goals the history Notre Dame football should demand, but enough to keep his job another year and get one more shot at proving the program is on the road to recovery.

And it wouldn't shock me for the Irish to take out Pittsburgh Saturday. It also wouldn't shock me in the least if this team collapsed, as it did at the end of last year.

This Notre Dame team, however, has become experts at changing direction and momentum. The early year was filled with fourth-quarter comebacks; lately, they've come up short. The defense originally couldn't stop the run, then the pass, and now maybe it's just up to whatever the opposition is most comfortable with.

Could they just reverse these trends again? I could easily see it happening, and I

don't see a team this talented limping to the finish line again.

Despite this, the margin for error after last week has been effectively reduced to zero. The vultures that circled Charlie Weis throughout 2007 and reappeared after the Syracuse game last year are back, and grow in number with every loss.

Negative speculation surrounding Notre Dame's future in the media only puts more pressure on the team, Weis and for Jack Swarbrick to make a decision. And the media loves nothing more than to cover struggles at Notre Dame. The two ESPN reporters at Tuesday's press conference were no accident, and they'll be back after another loss.

This game can go a long way towards reversing all that though. Not a complete 180, but at a lot can change with a win at Heinz Field.

The game would demonstrate that Weis and the Irish are still fighting upward and improving despite last week's evidence to the contrary. It would go against many of the damning tendencies that have plagued the team and coach over the last five years.

For example, 1-13 against ranked teams. Or 8-19 against teams that finish the season with winning records. Beating the Panthers won't make those statistics any more acceptable to those who are calling for Weis' head, but it could go a long way towards beating Connecticut and Stanford. Which would be enough, giving the Irish the 9-3 record most reasonable fans expected this season.

Weis deflected questions about the big picture and his future by maintaining he's focused only on Pittsburgh. While I think this is not humanly possible, Pittsburgh is his tipping point. With a team that has thrived on the momentum of close wins, I don't think Notre Dame will lose again if they come away with the upset Saturday.

With a loss, the window on the Weis era becomes inches away from closing, if not closed. 9-3 may have changed from 2006 to 2009 to become good enough; 8-4 or 7-5 certainly have not.

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

Contact Michael Bryan at [mbryan@nd.edu](mailto:mbryan@nd.edu)



**Michael Bryan**

*Associate Sports Editor*

## FOOTBALL RECRUITING

# Flowers enjoys visit to Notre Dame

By **BILL BRINK**  
Sports Writer

Despite the fact that Ricky Dobbs and Vince Murray, Navy's proverbial big guns, blew holes in Notre Dame's armor and plunged it into the depths, the Irish pulled off one victory last weekend.

Marquis Flowers, a running back and safety from Goodyear, Ariz., came away from his official visit very impressed with the Irish program.

"I think that they did a really good job with him," said Mike Frank, a Notre Dame recruiting analyst who runs the ESPN-affiliated Web site [irishsportsdaily.com](http://irishsportsdaily.com). "Obviously the game didn't turn out like they'd hoped but Marquis really enjoyed his time at Notre Dame. I think it really opened his eyes."

Flowers, at 6-foot-2 and 195 pounds, has rushed for 1,024 yards and 13 touchdowns on only 103 carries at Millenium High School in Goodyear. He also has 49 tackles, two interceptions and a blocked field goal on defense.

Flowers is also considering USC, UCLA, Arizona and Arizona State.

Frank said Notre Dame did three things successfully to impress Flowers: make him feel wanted, show he could fit in and make him feel comfortable. Still, Frank said, Flowers will

take official visits to other schools before deciding.

His father accompanied him on the visit.

"His dad is very pro Notre Dame and I think he likes a lot of what he saw as well with Marquis," Frank said. "... I think [the Irish] are definitely the team to beat right now."

Shocking considering the manner in which Notre Dame lost, 23-21, to Navy Saturday, its second loss at home to the Midshipmen in three years. But freshman linebacker Manti Te'o, who visited for last year's loss to Syracuse on Senior Day, chose the Irish, so luring a recruit in after a loss remains doable.

"I think the most important thing is they let the recruit know that this is the future, and 'look at the talent they brought in the last two classes and look at what we have,'" Frank said. "Obviously we're having a much better season. We just need a couple players to get us over the edge."

The problem with a loss like this one, Frank said, is there is no way to explain what happened — it is what it is.

"It's just a game where all

kinds of bad thing happen," Frank said. "You fumble, you trade turnovers, false starts. It seems almost like an unrealistic."

The fact that half the alumni already have visions of Urban Meyer, Jon Gruden or Brian Kelly dancing in their heads hinders the process. The rumors circulating around Irish coach Charlie Weis' job status may have already hurt the program's recruiting, Frank said.

"If there weren't all these uncertainties I think Notre Dame would have a lot of commits right now, big time players," he said.

Yet all is not lost. "Really the best thing that Charlie Weis can do is beat Pitt at this point," Frank said. "That will give a lot of people with a lot of uneasy feelings some reassurance that last week was a blip in the radar."

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

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Contact Bill Brink at [wbrink@nd.edu](mailto:wbrink@nd.edu)

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Recycle  
The Observer.



# Last defense

*Safety Kyle McCarthy becomes unquestioned leader of defense in fifth and final year*

By MATT GAMBER  
Sports Editor

On a Notre Dame defense, and particularly in a secondary, that has shuffled on an almost weekly basis in 2009, one piece of the puzzle has remained intact.

And does it come as a surprise to anyone that that piece is free safety Kyle McCarthy?

"It's been very important [to have him back there]," Irish defensive backs coach Corwin Brown said. "I think what he's done more than anything else is be able to keep the guys fairly settled, no matter who has been in there with him."

Ironically — or appropriately — enough, the same could be said about McCarthy's role in his off-campus home last year, when he lived with three of his teammates, including current fifth-year tackle Paul Duncan. In an Oct. 19, 2008, Irish Insider cover story, McCarthy called himself "the dad" of the house, where it was his job to keep his teammates in line.

It's not a perfect analogy — no analogy is — but McCarthy's role on the defense has been comparable this season.

"He understands the bigger picture better, and he's taken on more of a leadership role," Brown said. "He's the older guy back there, and he understands where he's at."

## Old Reliable

Whenever the Irish have struggled and have been in need of a big play, it seems like McCarthy's been there, with game-clinching interceptions in wins against Michigan State and Boston College contributing to his total of five picks for the year.

Often the last line of defense, McCarthy leads the Irish in solo (44) and total (72) tackles this season, and

it isn't close. Junior line-backer Brian Smith places second in both categories with 28 and 51, respectively.

And as the captain and unquestioned leader of the Notre Dame defense, it's McCarthy who is often responsible for making defensive calls and arranging his teammates in accordance with offensive formations and audibles.

"He makes a lot of calls. He's really football smart," senior defensive back Darrin Walls said. "That's one thing that we need out there. He directs people, tells them where to go and how to line up. When you have a guy like that who you can trust, that's always good."

McCarthy's persistence in having to wait until 2008 to earn a full-time starting spot make him a good example for younger players to follow as well, Walls said.

"I think the whole process for him, coming here behind [former Irish standout and current Baltimore Ravens safety Tom Zbikowski] and then finally having the chance to play and making the best of it — that's the kind of guy you want leading your team," Walls said.

## Family affair

Like any of his fellow fifth-year seniors, McCarthy has been around long enough to see just about everything, from back-to-back BCS berths to the worst two-year run in school history.

McCarthy has even been long around long enough to play two seasons with his younger brother, Dan, who as a sophomore has climbed the depth chart to become his older brother's backup. Looking at their resumes coming out of Cardinal Mooney H.S. in Youngstown, Ohio, it'd be hard to tell the McCarthy brothers apart.

Both were two-way stand-outs that won state titles as

quarterbacks and also posted gaudy statistics at defensive back while gaining state and national recognition for their individual efforts.

After earning all-conferences honors as a junior wide receiver, Kyle became the team's starting quarterback as a senior in 2004. McCarthy passed for 557 yards and five touchdowns and rushed for 1,273 yards and 14 touchdowns on just 135 carries to earn all-state recognition. As a defensive back, he recorded 70 tackles and made five interceptions, returning two for scores — including a record-setting 93-yard pick-six in the state title game to earn the game's MVP award.

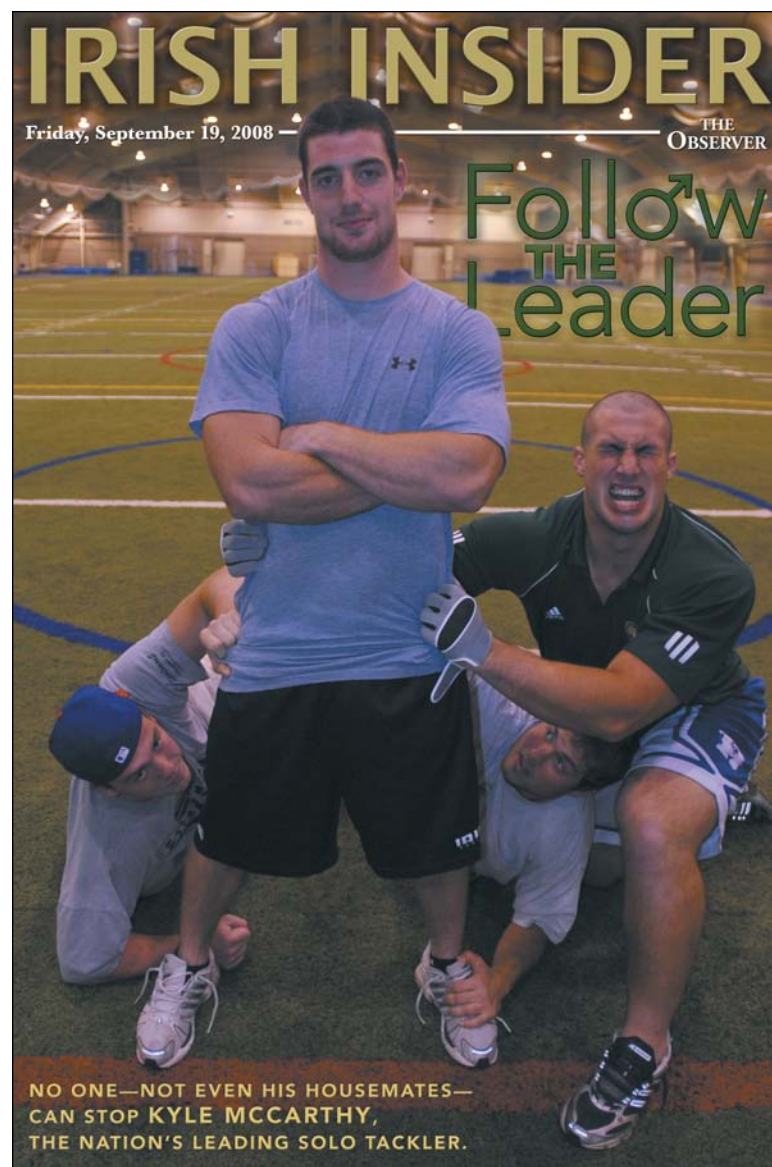
McCarthy also displayed his supreme athletic ability on the baseball diamond, where he set a school-record with 20 stolen bases as a senior and also posted seven wins and a sub-4.00 earned run average.

As for younger brother Dan? He was the Gatorade Player of the Year as a senior in 2007, and a finalist for the prestigious Mr. Football award in Ohio, earning second-team All America honors from USA Today, according to und.com. He rushed for over 3,000 yards and 36 touchdowns in two seasons at quarterback while posting 249 tackles and 16 sacks in his final two years on defense.

"It's been great playing with him. He's a real good player," Kyle said of his brother. "The guys on the team all think he's their little brother, too."

But Dan isn't the only brother Kyle sees on a daily basis at Notre Dame. After the craziness of his house last year, Kyle opted for a more quiet alternative this year, he said.

"I'm living with my older brother, who's also a grad student," Kyle said, referring to his brother Brian, 2006 Notre Dame graduate. "It's



Observer File Graphic

Senior safety Kyle McCarthy poses with three former teammates and housemates for the Oct. 19, 2008, Irish Insider cover.

definitely been a lot more laid-back. It's been great."

## Growing as a leader

Following in the footsteps of NFL-caliber safeties like Zbikowski and David Bruton, a Denver Broncos draft pick last season, McCarthy has improved not only as a player, but as the leader of the defense — a particularly important trait because of his role as a veteran and his position in the defensive backfield.

"Kyle's grown to be a great player and a great leader, and our players notice that," Walls said. "He's taken control in the weight room, in the locker room, and when you have a guy like that you can depend on, it really helps the team."

Walls said McCarthy is more of a "lead-by-example" type but knows the right time to step up and address the team.

"He doesn't always speak much, but when he does speak, people listen to him," Walls said. "They do what he tells them to do. He leads by example and everyone follows behind him."

Brown said the type of person McCarthy is makes him a good leader.

"Kyle is a classy dude, and I think the best thing about Kyle is he's not selfish," Brown said. "He's trying to help out others. I believe when you put others first, when it's not always about you, everybody else appreciates that ... That's why he's played the way he's played this year."

## Bouncing back

After last week's 23-21 loss to Navy, the second straight at home to the Midshipmen, the

Irish season reaches a crossroads at Pittsburgh Saturday. And with big-picture questions abounding about the state of the Notre Dame program five years into the Charlie Weis era, one might think McCarthy and his fellow captains would have a tough time keeping their team focused on a talented Panthers team.

That's not the case, McCarthy said.

"It has zero effect on how we go about doing things," McCarthy said. "That's all going outside the locker room. Inside the locker room, there's no questions or anything like that. We just go out and prepare everyday with trust in the guys in this locker room and trust in the coaching staff, and we're excited to play Pitt on Saturday."

Weis declared after the Navy loss that the theme this week would be "accountability," and McCarthy said Tuesday that early in the week — beginning Monday, when the players have the day off but it was reported a larger number than usual came in to work out and watch extra film — the returns were positive.

"As far as preparation and prepping for the game, our guys need to be accountable for the job at hand," McCarthy said. "The coaches are going to put us in the position to make plays, but it's up to the players to go out and execute and make plays. Last week we struggled a little bit, so we just need to maybe prepare a little harder, pay attention to detail, and hopefully get it corrected this Saturday."

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IAN GAVLICK/The Observer

Junior linebackers Harrison Smith, left, and Brian Smith congratulate senior safety Kyle McCarthy, center, after his interception during Notre Dame's 35-0 victory over Nevada Sept. 5.



# Notre Dame Fighting Irish

Record: 6-3

AP: NR Coaches: NR BCS: NR



Charlie Weis  
head coach

5th season at  
Notre Dame

career record:  
35-24  
on the road:  
12-9

against Pittsburgh:  
3-1



Jon Tenuta  
Def. Coordinator  
Assistant HC



Corwin Brown  
Co-Def. Coord.  
Associate HC

## 2009 Schedule

Sept. 5	Nevada — W
Sept. 12	@ Michigan — L
Sept. 19	Michigan St. — W
Sept. 26	@ Purdue — W
Oct. 3	Washington — W
Oct. 17	Southern Cal — L
Oct. 24	Boston College — W
Oct. 31	Washington St. — W
Nov. 7	Navy — L
Nov. 14	@ Pittsburgh
Nov. 21	Connecticut
Nov. 28	@ Stanford

## Head-to-Head

ND OFFENSE	PITT DEFENSE
Scoring: 30.11 ppg (36th)	Scoring: 17.11 ppg (19th)
Total: 463.67 (6th)	Total: 310.89 ypg (29th)
Rushing: 138.11 (71st)	Rushing: 106.78 ypg (26th)
Passing: 325.56 ypg (5th)	Passing: 204.38 ypg (38rd)
Turnovers against: 9 (7th)	Turnovers for: 17 (47th)
Fumbles lost: 5 (12th)	Fumbles rec.: 7 (61st)
Interceptions: 4 (11th)	Interceptions: 10 (40th)
Sacks Allowed: 19 (69th)	Sacks: 39 (1st)
T.O.P. for: 32:41 (9th)	T.O.P. against: 29:28 (45th)

## Statistical Leaders

ND OFFENSE	PITT DEFENSE
<b>QB JIMMY CLAUSEN</b> 209-308, 2770 yds., 20 TD	<b>DB DOM DeCICCO</b> 44 solo, 1 TFL, 2 INT
<b>RB ARMANDO ALLEN</b> 104 rush, 514 yds., 3 TD	<b>LB MAX GRUDER</b> 35 solo, 3 TFL, 0.5 sacks
<b>RB ROBERT HUGHES</b> 71 rush, 331 yds., 5 TD	<b>DL MICK WILLIAMS</b> 23 solo, 13 TFL, 3 sacks
<b>WR GOLDEN TATE</b> 65 rec., 1059 yds., 10 TD	<b>LB ADAM GUNN</b> 28 solo, 5.5 TFL, 5 sacks
<b>WR MICHAEL FLOYD</b> 23 rec., 499 yds., 6 TD	<b>LB GREG ROMEUS</b> 15 solo, 9 TFL, 7.5 sacks

# HEAD T

## Irish Offense vs. Panthers Defense

Irish Specialists

K

40 Tausch

48 Ruffner

P

43 Maust

35 Turk

LS

60 Cowart

50 Kavanagh

SS

52 Cave

60 Cowart

HLD

43 Maust

13 Sharpley

PR

23 Tate

5 Allen

KR

32 Riddick

21 Gallup, Jr.

FS

18 Holley

4 Fields

SS

31 Decicco

18 Holley

WILL

55 Cruder

40 Mason

MIKE

8 Gunn

6 Dell

SAM

38 Williams

15 Murray

CB

7 Chappel

26 Gary

DT

95 Williams

98 Aleckih

RE

91 Romeus

35 Lindsey

NT

93 Mustakas

94 Caragine

LE

97 Sheard

46 Hale

CB

17 Berry

22 Reed

X

23 Tate

18 Kamara

LT

72 Duncan

77 Romine

LG

59 Stewart

51 Wenger

C

55 Olsen

51 Wenger

RG

78 Robinson

51 Wenger

RT

74 Young

76 Dever

TE

83 Ragone

86 Burger

Z

3 Floyd

82 Partis

QB

7 Clausen

18 Sharpley

FB

34 Aldridge

86 Burger

RB

5 Allen

IRISH PASSING

Even though the rest of the team may have faltered in last week's loss to Navy, junior quarterback Jimmy Clausen continued to put up impressive numbers. The loss of sophomore tight end Kyle Rudolph will undoubtedly hurt the passing game, but junior Mike Ragone showed last week that he should be able to fill in well enough. Sophomore wide receiver Michael Floyd should be even closer to full strength after another week of rest and recovery. Floyd appeared to shake the rust off quickly against Navy last weekend with 10 catches, and will be even more effective Saturday night.

IRISH RUSHING

Notre Dame's leading rusher Armando Allen returns to action this week after missing the past two games with an ankle injury. When healthy, Allen has looked like the most effective Irish rusher this season, and his return to the lineup should mean a big boost in the Irish rushing attack. That being said, Robert Hughes also established himself with strong games against Washington State and Navy. Freshman Theo Riddick also had a breakout game against the Midshipmen, rushing five times for 35 yards against the Midshipmen despite receiving limited carries in the second half. On the other side of the ball, Pittsburgh boasts one of the strongest defensive lines in the country and held Navy, which gashed the Irish defense last week, to only 129 yards rushing. It's possible for the Irish to run the ball against Pittsburgh, but it will take a real commitment to the ground game that was absent against Navy.

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

The real test will be up front for the Irish, as Pittsburgh leads the country in sacks with 39. Notre Dame's offensive line has improved this season, but still gave up two crucial sacks to an undersized Navy defensive line last weekend. Keeping Clausen clean will be essential if the Irish want to come out winners.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

EDGE: PITTSBURGH

EDGE: EVEN

EDGE: EVEN

Our Picks

Think we're crazy?

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irishinsider@gmail.com

Bill Brink

Managing Editor

Remember that last touchdown drive against Navy? That showed heart, intensity and execution. That showed who Notre Dame can be if it so chooses. It's just gotta so choose, and it didn't, for the most part, against Navy. Losing twice in three years at home to Navy and hearing rumors your coach is done ought to do it. The Irish can't cover Jonathan Baldwin and they can't stop Dion Lewis. But they can win this game. Mr. Clausen and Mr. Tate have some experience with close victories, and Mr. Floyd should pick up the idea quite nicely. I'm usually the pessimist of the group, and it's tough to ignore the logical and statistical reasons why the Irish will lose, but to lapse into coachspeak, this game is about "want to," and right now Notre Dame wants to.

**FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 37, Pittsburgh 34 (OT)**

Michael Bryan

Associate Sports Editor

Jimmy Clausen said before the season that Charlie Weis wouldn't get fired because of him. And while you certainly can't fault Clausen for his play this season, he may have to save Weis' job with a win at Heinz Field. The Panthers are extremely talented on both sides of the ball, and can pick whether they want to run with Dion Lewis or pass with Bill Stull against the struggling Irish defense. Offensively, the Irish must run the ball to have a chance to win. Armando Allen's return could be big both in the run and passing game. These are two very talented teams, but Pittsburgh's stronger defense gives them the advantage to make a stop in overtime and get the win.

**FINAL SCORE: Pittsburgh 33, Notre Dame 30 (OT)**



For more matchups and pregame  
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# O HEAD

# Pittsburgh

# Panthers

**Record: 8-1, 5-0 Big East**  
**AP: #8 Coaches: #9 BCS: #12**



**Dave Wannstedt**  
head coach

## 5th season at Pittsburgh

**career record:**  
33-24

**at home:**

22-10

**against ND:**  
1-1



**Frank Cignetti, Jr.**  
**Off. Coordinator**



**Phil Bennett**  
**Def. Coordinator**

## 2009 Schedule

Sept. 5	Youngstown St. — W
Sept. 12	@ Buffalo — W
Sept. 19	Navy — W
Sept. 26	@ N.C. State — L
Oct. 2	@ Louisville — W
Oct. 10	Connecticut — W
Oct. 16	@ Rutgers — W
Oct. 24	South Florida — W
Nov. 7	Syracuse — W
Nov. 14	Notre Dame
Nov. 27	@ West Virginia
Dec. 5	Cincinnati

## Head-to-Head

<b><u>PITT OFFENSE</u></b>	<b><u>ND DEFENSE</u></b>
Scoring: 34.56 ppg (16th)	Scoring: 22.89 (49th)
Total: 408.44 ypg (37th)	Total: 386.22 ypg (79th)
Rushing: 187 ypg (26th)	Rushing: 148.78 ypg (67th)
Passing: 221.44 (61st)	Passing: 237.44 ypg (88th)
Turnovers against: 9 (7th)	Turnovers for: 17 (47th)
Fumbles lost: 5 (12th)	Fumbles rec.: 6 (80th)
Interceptions: 4 (11th)	Interceptions: 11 (30th)
Sacks Allowed: 9 (12th)	Sacks: 18 (55th)
T.O.P. for: 30:32 (45th)	T.O.P. against: 27:19 (9th)

## Statistical Leaders

<b><u>NAVY OFFENSE</u></b>	<b><u>ND DEFENSE</u></b>
<b>QB BILL STULL</b>	<b>SS KYLE MCCARTHY</b>
148-219, 1879 yds., 17 TD	44 solo, 2 TFL, 5 INT
<b>RB DION LEWIS</b>	<b>MLB BRIAN SMITH</b>
203 rush, 1139 yds., 12 TD	28 solo, 5 TFL, 1 INT
<b>WR JONATHAN BALDWIN</b>	<b>WLB MANTI TE'O</b>
35 rec., 698 yds., 4 TD	16 solo, 4.5 TFL, 1 sack
<b>TE DORIN DICKERSON</b>	<b>SLB DARIUS FLEMING</b>
39 rec., 450 yds., 10 TD	19 solo, 11.5 TFL, 3 sacks
<b>RB RAY GRAHAM</b>	<b>DE K. LEWIS-MOORE</b>
52 rush, 279 yds., 3 TD	24 solo, 7 TFL, 2.5 sacks



**EDGE: PITTBURGH**

**EDGE: PITTSBURGH**

**EDGE: NOTRE DAME**

## EDGE: PITTSBURGH



## Matt Gamber

*Sports Editor*


I can see two very different things happening in this game. I can imagine the Irish coming out with that deer in the headlights look we saw last season at USC after a disheartening loss to Syracuse that raised the same questions about the program's future that are circulating now. We all know how that turned out. But I can also picture the Irish coming out angry, motivated and prepared to play their best game against arguably the best team on their schedule. As a lifelong sports fan, I've seen these kind of stories end both ways. But as a Notre Dame fan, in recent years it seems like Door No. 1 has been the one most likely to be opened. I've been wrong out this team. I hope it happens again.

**FINAL SCORE: Pittsburgh 31, Notre Dame 20**



**Sam Werner**

*Associate  
Sports Editor*

A headshot of Sam Werner, a man with dark, wavy hair, wearing a white t-shirt, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

**Sam Werner**

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*Associate  
Sports Editor*

It would make absolutely no sense for Notre Dame to win this game. Of course, over the past three seasons, Notre Dame football hasn't exactly made a ton of sense. Expect the Irish to come out with an "us against the world" mentality, fighting for their season, as well as their head coach's job. Even though last week's loss to Navy was bad, this is still the same team that took USC down to the wire. Pittsburgh is good, for sure, but their biggest win so far this season was over an inconsistent South Florida team. Michael Floyd should be closer to 100 percent after an extra week of practice and recovery, and Charlie Weis will finally get his first win over a top ten team. Unfortunately for Weis, it may be too little, too late.

**FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 31, Pittsburgh 27**

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<https://www.irishtimes.com/podcast>

# Our picks

Think we're crazy?

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HOW ND'S OPPONENTS FARED

	(6-3) W 62-7 San Jose St.	Fresno St.
	(5-5) L 38-36 Purdue	@ Wisconsin
	(5-5) W 49-14 W. Michigan	@ Purdue
	(4-6) W 38-36 Michigan	Michigan St.
	(3-6) L 24-23 UCLA	@ Oregon St.
	(7-2) W 14-9 Arizona St.	Stanford
	(6-3) Bye	@ VA
	(1-8) L 48-7 Arizona	UCLA
	(7-3) W 23-21 ND	Delaware
	(8-1) 37-10 Syracuse	ND
	(4-5) L 47-45 Cincinnati	Bye
	(6-3) W 51-42 Oregon	@ USC

THE OBSERVER CLASSIFIED



#90 JOHN RYAN  
SR. DE 6'5" 255 LB.  
HOMETOWN: WESTLAKE, OH

Do you have a favorite singer or band?  
I would have to say probably Springsteen.

Q: What's your prediction for the Ohio State High School playoffs and your alma mater, St. Ignatius? I have to say [we will win], but it will be a good game. We are playing well.

What is your favorite place on campus?  
Probably Alumni Hall or the Grotto.

Do you have any favorite movies? Disney Channel original movies.

Any favorite songs? "Party in the USA" by Miley Cyrus.

Kanye West or Taylor Swift? Taylor Swift.

Do you have any pet peeves? Guys who wear K-Swiss shoes.

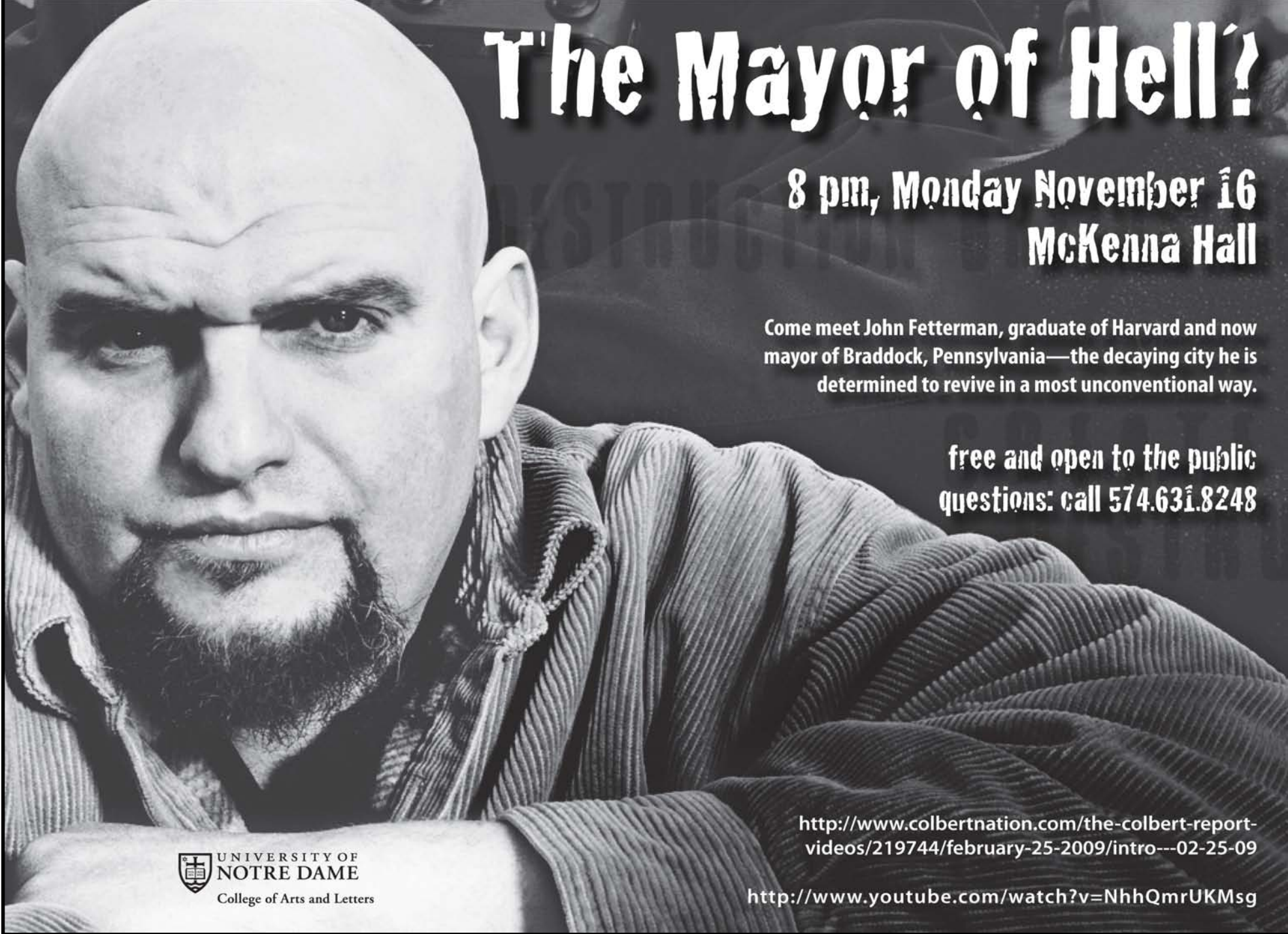
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# Pittsburgh game a homecoming for Walls

By SAM WERNER  
Associate Sports Editor

Saturday night's game against No. 8 Pittsburgh is undoubtedly a big game for every member of the Irish squad, but for senior cornerback Darrin Walls, the game will mean just a little bit more.

Walls, a Pittsburgh native, will be playing in his home-

town for the first time in his collegiate career. Inundated with ticket requests throughout the week, Walls said he was trying to figure out exactly how many friends and family members would be in attendance Saturday.

"I'm not sure as of now," Walls said. "I'm estimating around 25."

For a good number of those friends, it will be the first time they see Walls play.

"It's real exciting going home and playing in front of some of my family and friends that haven't seen me play before," Walls said.

Senior defensive back Raeshon McNeil said that Walls had been talking all week about the chance to play in his hometown.

"His mom's going to be in the stands, and she hasn't been out here to see him play. So that will be a big opportu-

nity for him."

Walls has played in all nine games for the Irish so far this season, and recorded 17 tackles as well as an interception.

Irish coach Charlie Weis said that, as good as Walls has been this season, he expects even more Saturday night.

"I think that this is going to be an exciting game for Darrin," Weis said. "And I think more than any game than he's played this year, I think that this is going to be one of those ones where I feel pretty confident that whatever his best is, we're going to get it."

"I kept in touch with him all the time, kept him up to date on the funny stuff going on in the meeting rooms," McNeil said. "We're always clowning in the meeting room, so he definitely missed some classic moments, but he was always talking about how he couldn't wait to get back."

Even though it may have taken Walls some time to get



Irish senior cornerback Darrin Walls leads the defense onto the field during last weekend's game against Navy. Walls will be playing in front of around 25 friends and family in his native Pittsburgh this weekend.

*"It's real exciting going home and playing in front of family and friends that haven't seen me play before."*

**Darrin Walls**  
Irish cornerback

back in the swing of Division I college football, McNeil said he thought the year off ultimately helped his friend.

"Him missing a year kind of brought things into perspective for him," McNeil said.

As exciting as the trip, home may be, Weis said that Walls is still aware of how important this game was for the team.

"I think that Darrin's going to be very excited to play in this game," Weis said. "And I think that that's a good thing because he's going to get challenged in this game as well."

Walls, too said that he was mostly focused on getting a big win this weekend.

"I mean, the coaches, they expect everyone to play well this weekend," Walls said. "We expect to play well. It's just another motivational factor that we're playing against the No. 8 team in the country."

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# Freshman Lewis breaks into starting role for Panthers

By BILL BRINK  
Sports Writer

He's a little guy, but he runs scary big.

Even scarier, he's a freshman.

The 5-foot-8 Dion Lewis has shown no mercy to opposing defenses this season. The No. 8 Panthers' (8-1) leading rusher has 1139 yards, seventh in Division I FBS, and 12 touchdowns so far this season.

"Our offensive line does a great job, those guys work hard all the time," Lewis said after Pittsburgh's 37-10 win over Syracuse on Nov. 7. "They deserve all the credit. They just keep pounding and blocking guys, clearing the way. I'm just staying patient, letting the game come to me."

His body of work rests on 203 rushing attempts, good for 5.6 yards per carry. In comparison, former Pittsburgh running back LeSean McCoy, whom the Philadelphia Eagles drafted in the second round of the 2009 NFL Draft, averaged 4.9 yards per carry last season, when he rushed for 1403 yards.

Lewis rushed 18 times for 110 yards and a touchdown against the Orange. His worst rushing game of the season came against Navy, when he carried the ball 23 times for 71 yards and a touchdown. In Pittsburgh's only loss, a 38-31 defeat from N.C. State on Sept.

26, he still managed 98 yards and two scores.

"We've faced a lot of good backs," Syracuse coach Doug Marrone said after Saturday's game. "I think from an overall scheme, [Lewis] is one of the best backs we've faced all season."

How's this for proof of how consistently spectacular Lewis has been this season: All Pittsburgh coach Dave Wannstedt said of Lewis' performance after the Syracuse game was, "Dion Lewis did a great job. He had his runs."

Ho-hum.

Lewis represents the latest in the tough running backs Notre Dame has faced this season. Nevada running back Vai Tavares has rushed for 880 yards this year, Purdue's Ralph Bolden has 855 and Boston College's Montel Harris has 930. Washington's Chris Polk, USC's Joe McKnight and Navy's Vince Murray have all had productive seasons as well.

The best may remain, however; after Lewis, Connecticut's Jordan Todman has rushed for 826 yards and 12 touchdowns and Stanford's Toby Gerhart is second in the FBS with 1,217 yards and 14 touchdowns.

Bad news for a Notre Dame defense that allows 148.8 yards per game and just gave up 348 to Navy.

Lewis, especially, presents a challenge because of his versatility.

"He's got quickness. He can

make you miss," Irish coach Charlie Weis said in his press conference Tuesday. "He has good balance. He catches the ball out of the back field. He's been very impressive."

Despite Lewis' youth, he's made an impression on his teammates as well as his opponents.

"Dion, just look at him, he's one of the leading rushers in the country," Panthers senior tight end Dorin Dickerson said after the Syracuse game. "I like to pat him on his back whenever he gets those runs because he really deserves it. He runs hard."

Lewis called the last four games of the season "crucial." That's especially true because the Panthers are fighting for a BCS birth with No. 5 Cincinnati, which leads the Big East at 5-0 (9-0 overall). At the same time, Saturday's game brings a new level of importance, especially since the last time Charlie Weis brought Notre Dame to Pittsburgh the Irish dismantled the Panthers 42-21 on Sept. 3, 2005 and especially since the two teams played each other so close in last year's game, a 36-33 overtime Pittsburgh win in Notre Dame Stadium.

"Everybody is excited about Notre Dame," Lewis said. "Everybody's going to be ready and fired up for this game."

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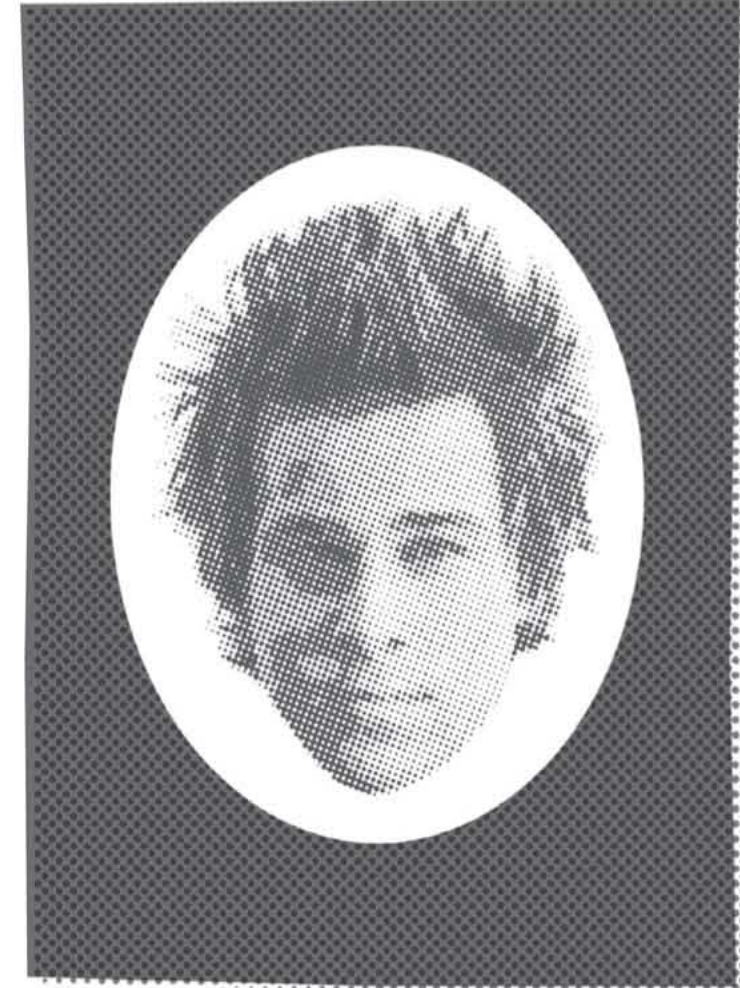
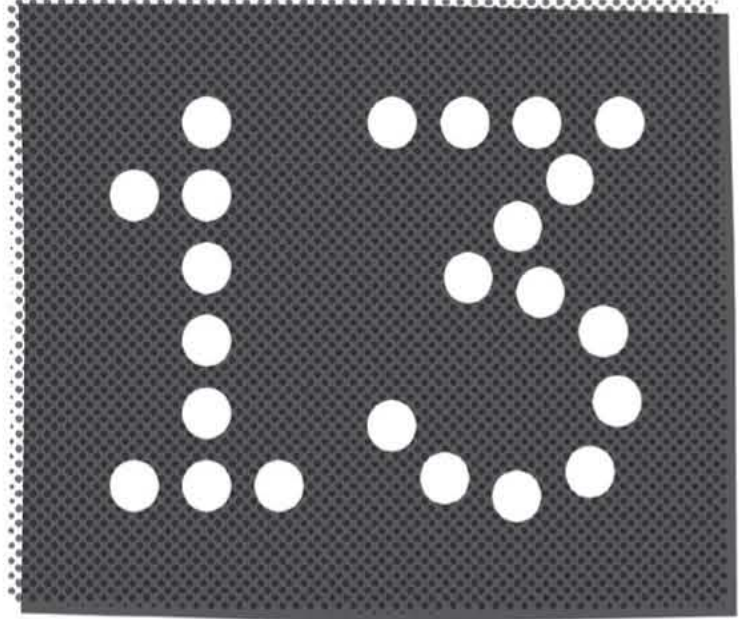
Pittsburgh running back Dion Lewis turns upfield during a game earlier this season. Lewis currently leads the Big East in rushing.



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