

IRISH INSIDER

Friday, April 23, 2010

THE
OBSERVER

'We need to care about
Our Lady. We need to care about
Notre Dame.'



COMMENTARY

Don't expect to see whole new system just yet

The helmets will still be gold.
The weather will still be awful.
The field will probably still be
100 yards.

That's about all that will be familiar Saturday as fans get their first glimpse of the new Notre Dame team, with a different coach on the sidelines and a different quarterback leading the huddle.

Laura Myers
Sports Writer

Supporters will head to the Blue-Gold Game looking for proof that change is not always a bad thing.

But at this point, the Irish have nothing to prove.

It would be a stretch to say that Irish coach Brian Kelly has installed a new offense and defense for the scrimmage. A more accurate statement is that Kelly has begun to install his new scheme and the players have begun to learn it. The entire breadth of the new systems certainly won't be seen Saturday. The coaches seem hopeful that a majority of the new offense will be installed in time for Purdue in September.

Most of the spring practices were spent getting players used to the speed of practice and teaching them about expectations. "Progress" meant being able to go all-out for 75 active minutes of a two-hour practice. On Saturday, it will be the same; the team will be expected to go full-speed through the

first half, but may need to tone it down for the second.

The defense won't be given full rein during the game, either. That's for good reason, as it would be irresponsible to allow an important offensive player to get hurt in a game that doesn't matter. But it means that sophomore line-backer Manti Te'o, one of the more entertaining players on the defense, probably won't be making any massive hits, nor will any others.

Junior quarterback Dayne Crist, recovering from off-season knee surgery, will play but has admitted that he is not at 100 percent. Junior tight end Kyle Rudolph, recovering from off-season shoulder injury, will be used sparingly.

The same goes for junior line-backer Darius Fleming and sophomore wide receiver Theo Riddick, both of whom will be important figures in the fall.

In short, the spring game will be absent much of the excitement a real game would bring, in terms of interesting game plans, big tackles and star players.

Through 13 practices, the same words have sprung up over and over. "Evaluation," the coaches said. "Competition," the players translated.

And that won't change by Saturday. The glorified practice will certainly showcase some of Notre Dame's excellent talent, but it will really be nothing more than a couple extra hours of film for the coaches to dissect leading into the summer session.

It might allow them to make a decision on whether senior



SARAH O'CONNOR/The Observer

Wide receiver Tai-ler Jones, an early enrollee, is one of many Irish looking to use Saturday's Blue-Gold Game to impress Brian Kelly and the new coaching staff one more time before spring practice ends.

Taylor Dever and junior Trevor Robinson should play right guard or right tackle. Or whether freshman receiver Tailer Jones is ready to line up opposite Michael Floyd. It might allow them to answer 1,000 other little questions.

Or it could answer nothing at all.

In his last scheduled interview before the Blue-Gold Game, Kelly had little to say about a depth chart.

"We need more time," he said. "We need all summer, we

need preseason camp. We're going to need all our time."

Kelly was speaking specifically about the wide receiver situation, but his message applies to every aspect of Notre Dame's team as it stands.

The Irish need all the time they can get, and it seems clear from the spring that Kelly will use that time wisely. After a summer of hard conditioning and a grueling camp in August, when the new recruits have been added and more of an offense installed, the team will

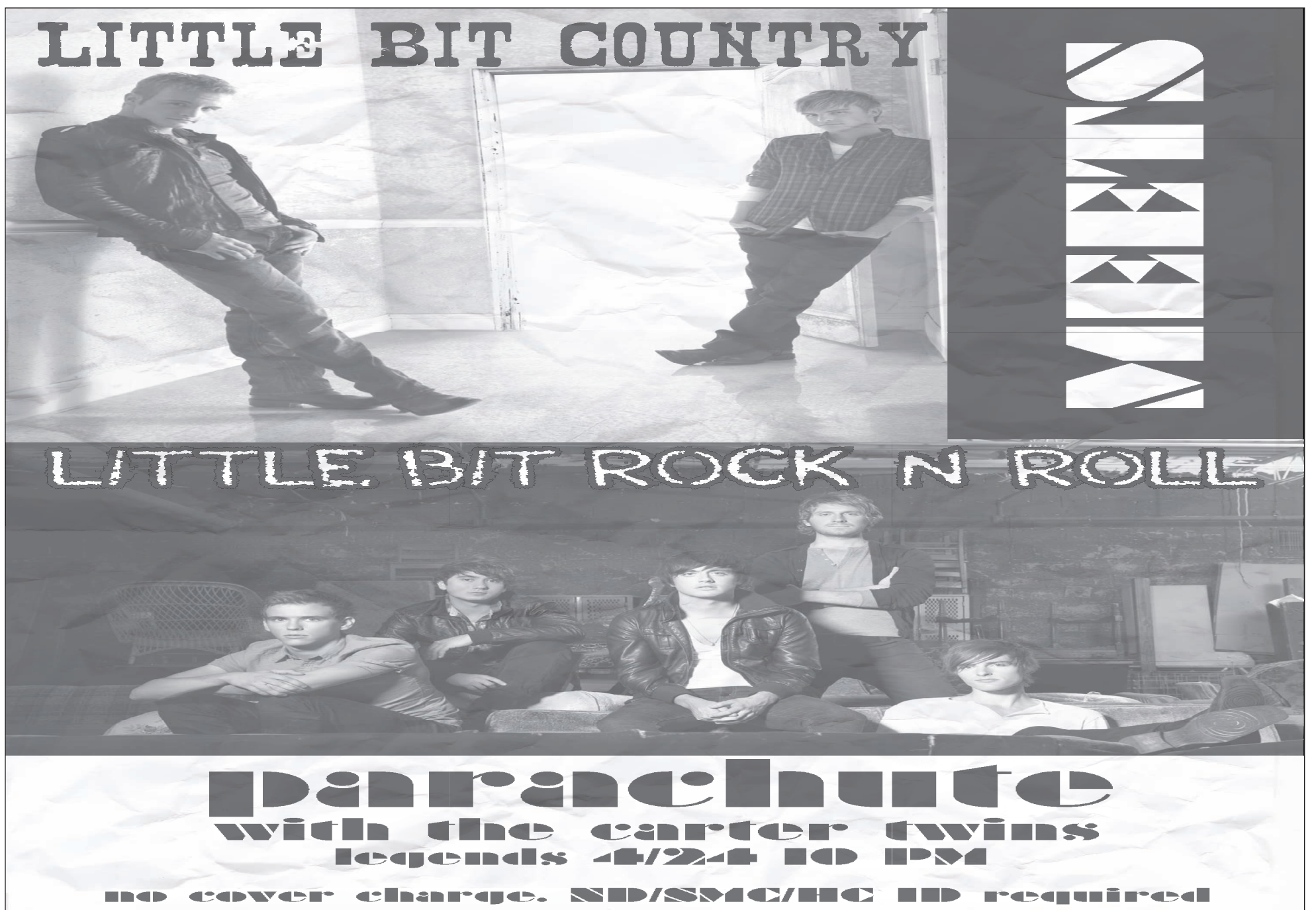
have something to prove. But not yet.

The Blue-Gold Game will certainly be exciting for anyone looking to see Brian Kelly in action. But it won't hold any indication of what this team is capable of.

And it shouldn't.

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

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‘They’re here for Notre Dame’

Kelly emphasizes physical, mental toughness as he prepares players for roles on field, in community

By MATT GAMBER
Sports Writer

When Brian Kelly was first introduced as Notre Dame’s football coach on Dec. 11, he said he wanted “tough gentlemen” who would represent the University on and off the field. Irish players in need of an example should look no further than their head coach.

In his first four months on campus, Kelly has made a noticeable effort to increase his program’s visibility within the Notre Dame and South Bend communities. To do so, he’s spoken at a variety of campus events, ranging from home basketball games to the Junior Parents Weekend Closing Brunch to a student government meeting earlier this week.

Kelly said his program will be “a part of what makes Notre Dame special,” something he said may not have entirely been the case before he arrived. So he’s made an effort to be “approachable” and has emphasized that his players will be true student-athletes and members of the University community.

That’s the gentleman: Always in a suit, looking and sounding more like a polished, personable politician than a hard-nosed coaching veteran charged with resurrecting the country’s most storied football program.

Walk toward the LaBar Practice Complex, though, and by the time you reach the Jordan Hall of Science, you’ll start to hear that gentleman barking orders as he demands the furious tempo and attention to detail he knows are vital to success after 20 years as a head coach. For those who have worked with Kelly, there’s no doubt he’s got the “tough” part down, too.

“If you were going to a street fight, you’d ask Coach to come with you, because he’s a rugged guy. That’s who he is,” Irish defensive coordinator Bob Diaco said. “Put the ball down, ‘mano y mano,’ let’s go. Separate the men from the boys, so to speak, and let’s just see who’s tougher and who’s ready to knock a guy off the ball. That’s really who he

is, in his core.”

And on the field, that’s what Kelly demands from his players — and it permeates through every aspect of his program, beginning with recruiting and ending with the finished product on Saturdays in the fall.

“There are tenants that must be followed for you to win, and the easiest way to describe what those are would be mental and physical toughness,” Kelly told The Observer in an exclusive interview April 15. “If you don’t have mental and physical toughness, then you probably won’t be a guy I can count on.”

Finding the ‘RKG’

There were once questions about whether the University’s tough academic standards inhibited Notre Dame’s ability to attract top-flight talent, but former coach Charlie Weis dismissed those by consistently reigning in highly touted players from around the nation.

Still, Kelly said he hears other schools “negative-recruit” his program by telling high school players they’ll have to work too hard to stay academically eligible at Notre Dame.

“If we’re going to lose kids that way, I’m glad we’re losing them,” Kelly said. “I want guys that understand if you come here, you’re going to get a powerful brand in Notre Dame on your degree. But on the flip side, you’ve got to work for it. That’s the kind of guy I want: somebody who recognizes the value of what makes this unique, and that’s academics and athletics.”

While those academic demands do trim the list of players the Irish can target, Kelly and his staff have cast a much wider net than the previous regime, in terms of offering scholarships to high school prospects. With a limited number of available scholarships — roughly 20 per year — it remains to be seen whether this strategy will prove successful, but it’s clear the new staff is putting in the work necessary to recruit effectively.

Kelly said that effort, coupled with Notre Dame’s national recognition, will enable the staff to recruit coast to coast to find players with “the right kind of



VANESSA GEMPIS/The Observer

Irish coach Brian Kelly has begun to instill into his team a sense of pride in the University of Notre Dame and in each other during the past month of spring practices.

intrinsic values we need.”

“Notre Dame is not meant for everybody, and when they rate high school students, they don’t give you four or five stars because you fit the model of Notre Dame,” Kelly said. “Somebody’s got to have more than four or five stars to impress us because we want more than that.”

To assess those attributes, Kelly said his staff must develop a relationship with not only the recruit himself, but also with his family and coaches, through campus visits and consistent correspondence. Kelly’s assistants get to know a player before assessing him within a standardized ranking system (detailed in the graphic at bottom left), and before Kelly will sign an official scholarship offer to a player, the position coach, the coordinator and the lead recruiter for the player’s geographical location must all approve.

So, for a running back from Chicago, running backs coach Tim Hinton, offensive coordinator Charley Molnar and lead Chicago recruiter Chuck Martin would all have to approve based on “a detailed profile players must pass to even get to my desk,” Kelly said.

“It’d be easy to just look at film, but that doesn’t tell the whole story,” he said. “Character, academics — those things are part of it. All the things that I believe, in my 20 years of being a head coach, is the right kind of guy. And that’s a guy I know I can coach, I know I can develop, and I know I can get to play championship football.”

‘Notre Dame, first and foremost’

The future success of the Irish program will largely depend on the new staff’s ability recruit, but Kelly and his assistants are also hard at work developing their current players in preparation for the 2010 season. While the physical element of the equation is certainly important, Kelly said there was an attitude adjustment that needed to be made as well.

“We need to care about Our Lady. We need to care about Notre Dame,” Kelly said. “When I got here, our guys thought about themselves first, then their family, then their teammates, then Notre Dame. I want them to flip that. They’re here for Notre Dame, first and foremost, and that’s really the paradigm shift for our players. They’ve got to care about each other and understand why they’re here.”

That means both on and off the field. Kelly said that beginning next fall, the entire team will attend every pep rally and “be involved with them.” When his players have free time, Kelly said they will participate in campus programs and commu-

nity service events while also becoming “more involved in church and chapel.”

That same concept of demanding more has extended to the practice field this spring. Though Kelly has at times been publicly tough on his team, he said the players

have begun to grasp not only the new offensive and defensive schemes, but also the attitude they are expected to take with them every day.

“I’d call it conscious competence where we are now. They know what we’re asking, they’re trying to do it every day, but it’s really hard,” Kelly said. “We want to get to unconscious competence, where it’s habit and they don’t have to think about it. They know what to expect when they go on the field, they know how I want them to practice and how I want them to compete.”

That learning process hasn’t always been comfortable for the players. Kelly said junior center Braxton Cave, for example, struggled with his shotgun snaps during the first week of practice.

“Every time he had a bad snap, I made sure he heard me. It got to the point where we just pulled him out,” Kelly said. “We were hard on him, but we haven’t had a bad snap since.”

Kelly said he made it clear during his first several team

meetings that he’d be tough on all his players, but he also knows there’s a line — he even invoked the old “beating a dead horse” cliché.

“You’ve got to be careful about what you’re getting on a guy for, and you’ve got to know that what you’re demanding is going to help them be a better football player,” Kelly said. “I don’t need to hear, ‘well, he doesn’t handle criticism.’ I’m not talking about criticism, I’m talking about doing it the right way.

“We’re talking about attention to detail and skill development. It cuts across all. If you’re thin-skinned, you’re either going to get tougher skin or you’re probably not going to make it.”

‘Enthusiastic, collegiate’

Hope springs eternal, and that’s seemingly never been as accurate as it’s been over the past few weeks near the Guglielmino Athletics Complex, where excitement for the 2010 season has already begun to build.

“Enthusiastic, collegiate. Play their tails off for four quarters and at the end of the day, we’ll figure out what the scoreboard says,” Kelly said of what fans will see out of the Irish next fall. “You won’t come to a game and see our guys play flat or uninspired. They’ll be passionate about what they’re doing or they won’t be out on the field.

“At the end of the day, if the person that sits in those stands can see their team, their colleague, their buddy, their dorm mate go out and play his heart out for Notre Dame, I’ve done my job.”

Those in attendance Saturday won’t necessarily see a sophisticated game plan, a bevy of bone-crunching collisions or an array of over-the-top emotion. But, in a way, there might be no better venue to see the kind of “tough gentlemen” Kelly has begun to mold in his first four months at Notre Dame.

“I’m a real believer that there’s some things you won’t do against your own teammates that you may do in a game against Purdue,” Kelly said with a smile. “That means we would pull back a little bit of that emotion because we don’t want to be showing up one of our own teammates. But guys will be competing. It’ll be fun.”

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BLUE-GOLD

Projected



BLAIR CHEMIDLIN | Observer Graphic

Editor's Note: The depth charts above are based on spring practice observations.

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Jones, Rees lead early enrollees into college

By DOUGLAS FARMER
Sports Editor

Freshman early enrollee Tailer Jones has spent as much time taking snaps with the first team offense as he has with the second, yet Irish coach Brian Kelly and his coaching staff don't mind reminding Jones that he is, in many ways, still a high school senior.

"He's still got the tassel on the car window from graduation. He's just a young kid," Kelly said after Saturday's practice. "He's got a chance to be a player for us and can contribute this year, but his work volume really tapers off."

Jones and the four other early enrollees — quarterback Tommy Rees and defensive backs Chris Badger, Spencer Boyd and Lo Wood — have all needed to adapt to a change in lifestyle, both on and off the field. The fact that they can handle that change sets them apart, wide receivers coach Tony Alford said.

"I think it takes a special young guy to come in at semester. You've got to be a little more mature for your years to come in," Alford said earlier in the spring. "These guys right now, their buddies are getting ready for prom. They're trying to pay somebody to be their date, and these guys are stuck here at col-

"[Tai-ler's] still got the tassel on the car window from graduation. He's just a young kid."

Brian Kelly
Irish coach

lege in the middle of spring football practice."

They're also on a new campus taking college classes at one of America's toughest academic universities.

"Coming from high school, it is different in college life," Rees said with a chuckle. "You have to find out where your classes are, how to get there ... You just have to make sure your time is divided up equally, find the balance between football and school."

That balance can be tough to find when you also need to absorb a playbook Kelly has spent 20 years crafting, but, in a way, the early enrollees have an advantage over the rest of the team in this regard, offensive coordinator Charley Molnar said.

"I think being a blank slate is a good thing from the standpoint that the techniques, play calls and all the things that we do are so different from what the previous system was," Molnar said. "They don't have to have two systems in their heads."

But they still do need to adjust to a BCS-level practice. Throughout his rise up the depth chart, the coaching staff routinely criticized Jones for a lack of endurance — something Jones does not dispute.

"The biggest surprise was the intensity at practice, and how they treat practices like the games," Jones said. "It really comes down to pushing myself more during practice, pushing through that wall. In high school I never really got fatigued."



JULIE HERDER/The Observer

Quarterback Tommy Rees, an early enrollee, has performed well enough throughout spring practice to earn praise from offensive coordinator Charley Molnar, right. Rees is one of five freshman to enroll early.

In that regard, enrolling early may have been the only solution, Molnar said.

"There is no question, [enrolling early] has helped him a lot," he said. "Going through winter workouts, getting with [strength and conditioning coach Paul Longo], getting with the quarterbacks and the other receivers. There is no way he would be ready to play if he came in August."

Come August, Molnar said Rees could also contribute, knowing Kelly's penchant for

playing many quarterbacks for various reasons.

"He really is made for a spread offense," Molnar said. "He's got a quick release, he makes very quick decisions, has quick feet in the pocket. From that standpoint, I think he's got a real chance to be a player here at Notre Dame."

The chance to contribute is why the early enrollees left behind graduation ceremonies and prom dates, Jones said.

"When I hit campus, my plan was to make the best of every

chance I get, and help the team in any way to win, whether it is on special teams, or second or third on the depth chart," he said. "Whatever I could do."

At the least, Jones, Rees and the three defensive backs impressed their coaches with their decision, Alford said.

"It takes a mature guy to do that," he said. "They're all doing a good job, and I'm proud of them."

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New staff gives receivers chance to compete



SARAH O'CONNOR/The Observer

Senior Duval Kamara leads a pack of receivers vying for playing time in Notre Dame's new spread offense.

By LAURA MYERS
Sports Writer

If recent practices are any indication, the first three wide receivers fans will see Saturday will be junior Michael Floyd, senior Duval Kamara and early-enrollee freshman Tai-ler Jones. But many others are competing for playing time, playing time that wide receivers coach Tony Alford said is anything but secure.

"We'll see. Guys have to keep making plays," Alford said. "It's an ongoing process, and just because you're there doesn't mean you'll be there the next day or if you're not there doesn't mean you won't be there the next day."

Junior John Goodman and sophomores Theo Riddick and Shaq Evans look to be the next three competing for a spot on the first team.

As a freshman in 2007, Kamara set receiving records for total receptions and touchdown receptions by a freshman with 32 and four, respectively. His role decreased in the following years, however, as he had to compete with Floyd — who broke both records in 2008 — and with former Irish receiv-

er Golden Tate.

"You're going to compete, either way, no matter who's here," Kamara said. "We had Golden Tate last year, guys had to compete. They have to compete now. It's no different. We have a bunch of talented guys. You just have to go out there and do what you have to do each day."

While Jones only arrived on campus in January, he has already made a name for himself, something Alford said was not surprising.

"He's a competitive guy and that's why we recruited him," Alford said. "We didn't recruit him to come here and sit down, we recruited him to compete and that's what he's doing."

The conversion of the offense from a pro-style offense to a spread offense should allow for more opportunities for the backup receivers to make plays and distinguish themselves.

"You just have to step up and take on the challenge of the new offense, a different offense," Kamara said. "Just retaining all the plays and everything, you just have to step up and go along with it like you've been running the offense for three years."

Goodman caught six passes

"You're going to compete, either way, no matter who's here ... We have a bunch of talented guys."

Duval Kamara
Irish wide receiver

for 104 yards in 2009, seeing action in nine games. Evans caught seven passes for 61 yards in six games. Riddick, a running back in 2009, played in all 12 games and caught six passes for 43 yards. Goodman has played with the first unit at times during spring practice, but all three have spent most of their time with the second team.

"I think that all those guys have done a great job of competing and really taking the time off the field to learn everything and then apply their knowledge off the field to what we're doing on the field," junior quarterback Dayne Crist said. "They've all got very unique skill sets and they definitely offer something different, but I know they share the commonality of wanting to compete and be on the field."

"Seeing the competitiveness of those guys is really positive and something you want to see at the quarterback spot."

Crist said he has had time to work with all of the receivers in order to establish timing and rhythm with each one, which he said is critical no matter who is on the field.

"It's good knowing that you're going to get the cream of the crop at the end of the day and you're going to get the most competitive guys out there," he said.

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Switch should benefit both Wood and Riddick

By MATT GAMBER
Sports Writer

In one of his first public personnel decisions in early March, Irish coach Brian Kelly said he would move sophomore Theo Riddick from running back to wide receiver to clear room in the backfield for, among others, Cierre Wood.

Riddick was second to only Golden Tate in all-purpose yards for the Irish last season, as he racked up 160 yards rushing, 43 receiving and 849 returning kicks as a true freshman. Wood, on the other hand, never saw the field in his rookie campaign — something the new staff wanted to change to ensure the Irish used as many of their playmakers as possible.

“It’s been a good opportunity, just learning the offense and everything that comes with it,” Wood said. “I’m real comfortable with it. I’m so versatile, they can line me up as a receiver, in the slot — either way, I’m going to do my thing, period. I think this

offense fits me perfect.” Running backs coach Tim Hinton said Wood has made significant progress given the increased workload this spring.

“Cierre’s had a really solid spring and he’s getting better every day,” Hinton said. “He’s the rawest of the guys we have, but he got the fewest reps of anybody coming in here. He has more development to do than most, but he wants to be good and he understands what it’s going to take for him to be good.”

For Riddick, while his position has changed, his individual coach hasn’t. Wide receivers coach Tony Alford

coached the running backs last year and was the only assistant retained from Charlie Weis’ staff. He said Riddick is far from a finished project but has shown promise in his first few weeks at receiver.

“He’s still learning some things,” Alford said. “He’s got to pay attention to the details of the game, nuances of the routes, getting in and out of breaks and things like that.

But he’s coming along.”

Though Riddick is the only running back to have made an official position switch this spring, Hinton said the new offense demands every running back be capable of splitting out and catching passes.

“Those guys are going to learn how to be wide receivers, and they’re in the development stage in that,” Hinton said. “Listen, if you’ve got the post route and you’re the back, run that post route like you’re the best receiver in America and catch it like you’re the best receiver in America, because that one opportunity might win us a game.”

Even with Riddick’s move, the running back position will still be one of the most competitive on the roster, with Armando Allen, Robert Hughes and Jonas Gray all returning after contributing last season.

“Competition makes us all better, and they all want to play,” Hinton said. “I told my guys very honestly, if you’re selfish and really worried about playing time, or numbers of runs or catches, or you see a buddy mess up and you’re almost happy he messed up instead of coaching him better, you’re the wrong guy for us. The bottom line is this is about us winning.”

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Recruits visit campus before, during weekend

By DOUGLAS FARMER
Sports Editor

Throughout its first month on campus, the Irish coaching staff focused on the recruiting class that will join Notre Dame in the coming fall. As soon as National Signing Day passed in February, the coaches refocused their efforts on making up the ground lost in recruiting battles for members of the high school Class of 2011.

“We were way behind after Signing Day ... It wasn’t just getting through last recruiting season, it was starting our next one,” recruiting coordinator Chuck Martin said. “We’ve caught up to a large extent, and now we’ve just got to keep plowing away. I really feel like we’ve closed the gap.”

With about a dozen recruits visiting campus for the Blue-Gold Game, this weekend could be a big step in closing that gap Irish recruiting analyst Mike Frank said.

“This is going to be a pretty exciting weekend for Notre Dame,” said Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliated website irishsportsdaily.com. “There are some big-time players coming in, and there is a chance they could get some commitments this weekend.”

Chicago-area wide receiver DaVaris Daniels could potentially commit this weekend. He is one of the most-sought after players in the country, and his offer list includes the likes of Alabama, Cincinnati and Michigan.

“[Daniels] fits perfectly into Brian Kelly’s system,” Frank said.

“They aren’t going to take a whole lot of wide receivers in this class, maybe two at the most. So getting his commitment would be pretty big, and allow them to focus on other positions.”

The most likely to commit before leaving campus this weekend is linebacker Jarrett Grace, from Cincinnati.

Linebacker Sean Duggan, another Cincinnati native, and offensive lineman Conor Hanratty were both raised on Irish football lore by fathers who graduated from Notre Dame. Hanratty’s father, Terry Hanratty, quarterbacked the Irish to the 1966 National Championship.

“[Conor is] coming this weekend, and I think he gets in Thursday, so he’ll be here awhile,” Frank said. “Who knows if he’ll pull the trigger or not, but I think Notre Dame has a real good chance at landing him.”

Quarterback Bubba Starling visited the Irish early in the week, departing Tuesday, and afterward listed Notre Dame as one of the top five schools he is considering, along with Alabama, Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma.

“I think Notre Dame would like to get a quarterback,” Frank said. “I think he’s a guy that they’re pretty high on. They really like him a lot, a tremendous talent that needs to be fine tuned a little bit.”

Cornerback Matthias Farley also visited earlier in the week and committed to Notre Dame Wednesday.

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2010 SCHEDULE

	Sept. 04 vs. Purdue	@ Notre Dame
	Sept. 11 vs. Michigan	@Notre Dame
	Sept. 18 vs. Michigan State	@ East Lansing, MI
	Sept. 25 vs. Stanford	@ Notre Dame
	Oct. 02 vs. Boston College	@ Chestnut Hill, MA
	Oct. 9 vs. Pittsburgh	@Notre Dame
	Oct. 16 vs. Western Michigan	@ Notre Dame
	Oct. 23 vs. Navy (Meadowlands Stadium)	@ East Rutherford, NJ
	Oct. 30 vs. Tulsa	@ Notre Dame
	Nov. 13 vs. Utah	@ Notre Dame
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