

# IRISH INSIDER

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THE  
OBSERVER

## Balancing Act

Tyler Eifert develops  
into a prolific tight end  
while showing younger  
players the ropes.

Photo Illustration by Pat Coveney and Brandon Keelean



## COMMENTARY

# Untraditional moves build winning culture

It's not difficult to pinpoint the reasons for Notre Dame's .500 record. Late turnovers in the red zone, poor decision-making at the quarterback position and a tired defense that spends too much time on the field have all contributed to the two blemishes on the Irish record.

As such, Notre Dame has a slew of on-field issues to deal with before it returns to the gridiron against Purdue. Nonetheless, Brian Kelly and his coaching staff have their work cut out for them off the field as well.

Traditional problems lead to traditional solutions. Better decision-making late in games and better time-management are battles within the game Kelly can coach improvement in his players.

As for bringing Notre Dame back to the elite level in college football, tradition may be less of a guide.

In essence, Kelly was tasked with much more than simply bringing a championship to Notre Dame when Director of Athletics Jack Swarbrick handed him the keys to college football's most storied castle. Kelly inherited a program mired in mediocrity and set in its ways.

He had the unenviable mission of bringing Notre Dame into the 21<sup>st</sup> century of college football — easier said than done when you're talking about a program that lives and breathes tradition.

But nothing about Kelly's approach to Notre Dame thus far has been traditional. From his rejection of the pro-style offense in favor of the spread, to changing the gameday players' walk into Notre Dame Stadium, Kelly

has instituted his unorthodox system in every facet of the football experience.

And it's working. After putting together a core of freshmen and the No. 7-ranked recruiting class in the nation in his first full season as head coach, Kelly is at it again. Notre Dame already has four five-star recruits committed, the most of any program in the nation. Critics who claim Notre Dame simply can't recruit like before have been foiled by the impacts freshmen Aaron Lynch, Stephon Tuitt and George Atkinson have already made on Saturdays.

True, winters in South Bend make Tuscaloosa and Gainesville look like paradise. But unlike his predecessor, Kelly hasn't sold recruits on three or four years of servitude before a career in the NFL. He's taken recruiting to the next level by selling players on a collegiate experience unlike any other.

The decision to start the less physically-gifted Tommy Rees over Dayne Crist is unconventional. Focusing recruiting efforts on the defensive side of the ball rather than on pure skill players is untraditional (all four 2012 five-star commits are defenders).

But it's working, and more changes are coming.

In his radio show last Thursday, Kelly hinted that the addition of bigger, high-definition scoreboards at Notre Dame Stadium could happen sooner than later.

"If you're going to stay in this arena, I'm sure things will eventually change," Kelly said. "It's just going to take some time."

If you're going to stay a Notre Dame fan, football as you know it will eventually change. Tradition gives way to progress (and winning).

It's just going to take some time.

Contact Chris Masoud at [cmasoud@nd.edu](mailto:cmasoud@nd.edu)

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



Chris Masoud

Assistant  
Managing  
Editor

## FOOTBALL RECRUITING

# Notre Dame builds 2012 class

By ALLAN JOSEPH  
Sports Editor

Despite his insistence on recruiting quality linemen, Irish coach Brian Kelly has focused his 2012 recruiting class on bringing a number of skill players to campus, Irish recruiting expert Mike Frank said.

"The biggest priority for this class was what they call skill players," said Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliate Irish Sports Daily. "They wanted to sign a good number of those players."

Notre Dame currently holds commitments from nine skill players, most notably athlete Ronald Darby, receiver Justin Ferguson and cornerback Tee Shepard. With months left until signing day, however, Frank expects that number to grow.

"I wouldn't be surprised if that number climbs to 11 or 12, maybe even 13 depending on how this shakes out," Frank said.

Notre Dame focused on running back in the 2012 class, a position where the Irish have had little depth this year.

"[The Irish] have to get two really good running backs," Frank said. "I'd be surprised if Will Mahone doesn't commit sometime soon."

If Mahone, from Ohio, commits to the Irish, Notre Dame can focus on recruiting more explosive backs that can run in tandem with Mahone's style.

"They've got three different players coming in ... in Keith Marshall, Byron Marshall (no relation) and KeiVarae Russell," Frank said. "All three of those guys are more speed and quickness, explosive-type players where Mahone is certainly fast and certainly explosive, but he just has a little more size and power. If he commits soon, that solves one issue, and then they can really focus on landing one of those three players."

Receiver was also an area of concern for the Irish, who will be tasked with replacing senior Michael Floyd after this season. Yet after seeing the Irish land Ferguson and Chris Brown, Frank said Notre Dame is looking for a bit of a different receiver to add to its stable.

"They're definitely looking for one more wide receiver that's kind of a more explosive, slot, Theo Riddick-type player, somebody who can put a lot of pressure on defenses," Frank said. "That's really kind of the missing piece they have to get at wide receiver."

Notre Dame has also heavily recruited secondary players in the class of 2012, and while the Irish have a number of commits with defensive backfield experience, Frank said the Irish would be willing to sign one more.

"I'm sure they would like to have one more corner if possible," Frank said. "They've really kind of set themselves up with some players that can really help them. A lot of these guys that are thinking about Notre Dame are really on the fence."

Perhaps the most important

hole in Notre Dame's 2012 class is at offensive tackle, where the Irish recently received a big commitment — from a 2013 player, Steve Elmer.

"The last thing that they need more than anything, is an offensive tackle," Frank said. "I'll tell you, having a guy like Steve Elmer, the 2013 commit, he's going to be probably the top offensive tackle in the whole

Midwest next year — having him commit early, doesn't make it quite as big a need to get an offensive tackle. If there's the opportunity to take one, they'll take one, because the guys

that are considering Notre Dame right now are too good to pass up."

Elmer's commitment is a reminder that despite the focus on skill players in the 2012 class, Kelly is firmly committed to developing high-quality line play.

"Brian Kelly is building this team at the most important

place where he needs to build it, and that's offensive line and defensive line," Frank said. "The big thing is, you've got to control the line of scrimmage. If you have great offensive linemen and great defensive linemen, you're going to be a really great team."

"It doesn't matter what skill players you've got if you don't have good players up front."

While Notre Dame may not be ranked on the field, Frank said the Irish recruiting class is already one of the best in the country with a number of slots to fill. "They have the chance to definitely go into the top-five or higher depending on who they get," Frank said. "There are about 6-7 slots left, and I would think everybody filling those slots would be a four-star or higher. If that's what they end up with, they're going to climb into the top-five, I would guess. Right now, because the numbers are a little low compared to some others, I'd say they're probably a top-10 class."

For more on Notre Dame

recruiting, check out Mike Frank's [irishsportsdaily.com](http://irishsportsdaily.com).

Email Mike at [mikefrank18@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mikefrank18@sbcglobal.net) and tell him The Observer sent you.

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# Country boy

*Junior tight end Tyler Eifert spreads his love of country music and football around the Irish*

By ANDREW OWENS  
Associate Sports Editor

When junior tight end Tyler Eifert returned to campus following Notre Dame's physically exhausting 15-12 win over Pittsburgh on Saturday evening, the simple country boy did what he knows best — he went to a Toby Keith concert.

"[Country] is all I listen to," Eifert said before rattling off a list of his favorite country artists. "I used to like rap, but that's just because I liked the beat. I didn't know what they're saying and now that I know what they're saying it's kind of ridiculous. [Country fits] my personality I guess and the lyrics mean a lot. I enjoy it."

Although Eifert is a strong proponent of country music, he has not succeeded in spreading the love to all of his teammates.

"No, I will never [listen to country music]," junior running back Cierre Wood said. "I tried, I honestly tried to listen to country music. Because I asked [my friends who listen to it.] 'Why do you guys like country music?'"

"They were basically telling me it's about having a good day, sitting outside with your friends, stuff like that. I was like, 'I can dig that.' But I tried listening to it, and it's like a ruckus to my ears. I just can't. I just can't. I tried it. I got some selections ... but it all sounds the same to me, really."

Saturday marks a homecoming of sorts for Eifert — the country music aficionado and native of Fort Wayne, Ind., who played high school football at Bishop Dwenger, a mere 119 miles from Purdue's Ross-Ade Stadium.

Growing up a Boilermaker buff, Eifert often traveled to games and said he has fond memories of watching current New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees in a Purdue uniform. Those experiences were not always positive, though.

"Notre Dame usually won and that was annoying," Eifert said.

As a freshman in 2009, Eifert did not participate in the 24-21 Irish victory. Saturday will mark his first time playing in the stadium he knew so well as a child.

"It will be cool," he said. "It's a place I'm familiar with. I've been there a lot. I just need to approach it as any other game ... I've

been there a million times but never played there, so I look forward to it."

Eifert was widely recruited across the Midwest in high school, but ultimately he chose Notre Dame over Purdue and left behind the memories he had collected over 17 years.

"Being recruited and deciding where you're going to go to school, it's a tough decision and being so familiar with the place and growing up around it, yeah, it made it a tough decision," he said.

When Eifert looks up at the lit-up stands Saturday night, he might see some familiar faces, but he said everything is about preparing to leave town with a victory.

"When it comes down to it, it's just a football field like anywhere else and that's how you have to approach it," he said.

## 'Baptism by fire'

Last season, Eifert benefited from playing behind a preseason All-American tight end in Kyle Rudolph, but that security blanket was pulled away from under

Eifert's feet when Rudolph was hampered by a hamstring injury and eventually underwent season-ending surgery.

"I think he kind of got a baptism by fire a year ago with what happened to Kyle," tight ends coach Mike Denbrock said. "He had to grow up fast. I don't know how ready he was for it, but he continues to improve and come to practice everyday and work his tail off."

"What you see in practice you're kind of confident in, but until you put them in a game situation and see what they do, you don't really know what you have."

Eifert responded by making a name for himself when he caught 27 passes for 352 yards and two touchdowns in Rudolph's absence. The junior played an integral role in the season-ending four-game winning streak, sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees said.

"I think we feel real comfortable with each other," Rees said. "We both started playing at the same time last year. As far as the connection and chemistry, I think it's real strong on the field and I think our off-the-field relationship helps that."

## Big brother, little brother

Eifert's rapid development is due in large part to Rudolph's influence as the two have developed a close bond and continue to stay in touch even now that Rudolph is playing in the NFL.

"He texted me after the [Pittsburgh] game and we stay in contact," Eifert said. "He's taught me a lot of what I know about football and he really helped me adjust to playing at the college level. He's been a huge part of my success."

Rudolph said he tried to flood Eifert with information.

"I just tried to give him as many tips and tricks as possible, whether in his preparation throughout the week or little things I found helpful in route running or being able to be a capable blocker as a tight end,"



SUZANNA PRATT/The Observer

**Junior tight end Tyler Eifert caught eight passes for 75 yards in last week's 15-12 victory over Pittsburgh.**

said Rudolph, now with the Minnesota Vikings. "I feel like Tyler has done everything in his power to set up the offense."

Denbrock said Rudolph's advice combined with game experience has been valuable for Eifert.

"I think [learning from Rudolph] certainly couldn't do anything but help," Denbrock said. "I think the thing that probably pushed him forward in his preparation is getting the experience he got last year unfortunately when Kyle was injured. But having Kyle here to help kind of mentor him and help him through that transition to becoming the No. 1 guy was very beneficial to him."

Eifert is the next piece in a long tradition of elite tight ends at Notre Dame, which includes current NFL talents Anthony Fasano, John Carlson and Rudolph in a string of dynamic Irish playmakers.

"[Notre Dame] just brings in the right kind of guys," Rudolph said. "Guys that work hard, especially like Tyler. While I was there, he was always trying to learn and soak up as much information as he could, even though he wasn't the starter and he went out and surprised a lot of people, but the people at practice knew he could [succeed]."

With the Irish trailing Pittsburgh 12-7 in the fourth quarter last Saturday and senior receiver Michael Floyd shut down by the defense, Eifert stepped up in the most telling moment of his development with eight catches for 75 yards. On the game-winning drive, Rees connected with his 6-foot-6, 249-pound target four times for 34 yards, a touchdown and a two-point conversion, earning him John Mackey Tight End of the Week honors.

"He provides a mismatch for us out there," Rees said. "He does

a good job of feeling throughout the zones, making himself open. He's a big, athletic target. He can go up and get a lot of the balls."

Rudolph was most impressed by Eifert's growth since his freshman year.

"He's definitely matured a lot since his first year there, especially watching the game at Pitt he just kind of took over at the end of the game," Rudolph said. "A lot of big catches, especially on the last drive, when he got a big third down and a touchdown and the two-point conversion."

## Student-teacher

With senior Mike Ragone out for the season with an injury, Eifert is by far the most experienced tight end on the squad, with junior Jake Golic, sophomore Alex Welch and freshman Ben Koyack behind him on the depth chart. He has now seen a 180-degree shift in his approach, filling Rudolph's shoes in terms of being a mentor for younger teammates.

"They're great tight ends too and if there's something they need help on or advice I can give them, I'm there to do it," he said.

Although Eifert is now the leader of the position on the team, he said he is still learning and developing each week, particularly as a blocker.

"I'd say small things to do with blocking [are aspects to develop]," he said. "There are still some things I need to work on. Everybody knows that — just the small techniques about where to put my head and little things of the blocking aspect."

So what would be a successful homecoming for Eifert? A productive game and a Notre Dame victory, all capped off by listening to some tunes by Toby Keith.

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JULIE HERDER/The Observer

**Junior tight end Tyler Eifert tries to break away from a South Florida defender during Notre Dame's 23-20 loss to South Florida. Eifert had six catches for 93 yards in that game.**



IRISH PASSING

Tommy Rees struggled with a complex Pittsburgh defensive scheme and, until finishing the game on a 9-for-9 mark, was 15-of-32.

Purdue is likely to employ some of the same tactics as Pittsburgh in order to minimize Michael Floyd's production and slow the Irish offense. The senior was held to four receptions and 27 yards against the Panthers. If the Boilermakers are successful in that regard, Notre Dame will need another player to step up, as tight end Tyler Eifert did last week.

The Purdue pass defense ranks 26th in the nation through three games, including holding Southeast Missouri State to 66 yards through the air in the 59-0 Boilermaker victory Sept. 17.

Much of Notre Dame's problems on defense can be attributed to the opposition's pass rush. When Rees is forced to throw on the run, he is much less accurate. The Boilermakers have recorded four sacks in the first three contests of 2011.

IRISH RUSHING

Notre Dame ranks 58th in the nation in rushing through four games and has struggled at times to get a consistent flow to the unit.

Jonas Gray scampered down the sidelines for Notre Dame's longest rush in 11 years when he recorded a 79-yard second-quarter touchdown Saturday. Cierre Wood rushed for 94 yards on 23 carries and Brian Kelly said he was pleased with Wood's improvement between the tackles.

Purdue's opponents have averaged 109 yards per game on the ground through three games and have forced their opponents to be one-dimensional.

Linebacker Joe Holland leads the unit with 27 tackles, and the defensive line paces the defense with four tackles for loss.

The Irish are still looking for their first complete game when it comes to running the football. Wood and Gray have the ability to control the pace of the game behind the talented Irish offensive line, and a balanced attack would go a long way toward a Notre Dame win on the road.

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

Notre Dame committed two turnovers Saturday, its lowest mark of the season, but not enough for the coaching staff to feel relieved just yet.

Attention must still be paid to the fundamentals. Between the 15 Irish turnovers in four games and penalty issues (the Irish committed eight infractions that cost them 85 yards against Pittsburgh), the offense cannot be at its best until it cuts the mistakes.

Kelly and offensive coordinator Charley Molnar will likely try to establish the running game early, which will open up the struggling passing attack.

Head-to-Head

Notre Dame Offense

WR	7	TJ Jones	So.
	16	DaVaris Daniels	Fr.
WR	6	Theo Riddick	Jr.
	9	Robby Toma	Jr.
LT	70	Zack Martin	Jr.
	72	Nick Martin	Fr.
LG	66	Chris Watt	Jr.
	76	Andrew Nuss	Sr.
C	52	Braxton Cave	Sr.
	57	Mike Golic Jr.	Sr.
RG	78	Trevor Robinson	Sr.
	65	Conor Hanratty	Fr.
RT	75	Taylor Dever	Sr.
	74	Christian Lombard	So.
TE	80	Tyler Eifert	Jr.
	18	Ben Koyack	Fr.
WR	3	Michael Floyd	Sr.
	81	John Goodman	Sr.

Notre Dame Defense

CB	12	Robert Blanton	Sr.
	23	Lo Wood	So.
OLB	45	Darius Fleming	Sr.
	46	Steve Filer	Sr.
DE	90	Ethan Johnson	Sr.
	19	Aaron Lynch	Fr.
NG	9	Louis Nix	So.
	98	Sean Cwynar	Sr.
DE	89	Kapron Lewis-Moore	Sr.
	7	Stephon Tuitt	Fr.
OLB	55	Prince Shembo	So.
	56	Troy Niklas	Fr.
CB	4	Gary Gray	Sr.
	2	Bennett Jackson	So.

IRISH SCHEDULE

Sept. 3	South Florida
	(L, 23-20)
Sept. 10	@ Michigan
	(L, 35-31)
Sept. 17	Michigan St.
	(W, 31-13)
Sept. 24	@ Pittsburgh
	(W, 15-12)
Oct. 1	@ Purdue
Oct. 8	Air Force
Oct. 22	USC
Oct. 29	Navy
Nov. 5	@ Wake Forest
Nov. 12	Maryland
Nov. 19	Boston College
Nov. 26	@ Stanford

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

Notre Dame continues to struggle on special teams with a shaky punt return situation. David Ruffer missed a 39-yard field goal for the Irish, though three of four Ben Turk punts were downed inside the 20-yard line.

George Atkinson and Kyle Brindza are the bright spots in an otherwise struggling unit. Atkinson returned a kickoff 36 yards against Pittsburgh a week after returning a kickoff for a touchdown against Michigan State.

Notre Dame Specialists

PK	97	David Ruffer	Sr.	S	22	Harrison Smith	Sr.
					15	Dan McCarthy	Sr.
P	35	Ben Turk	Jr.	ILB	48	Dan Fox	Jr.
					44	Carlo Calabrese	Jr.
LS	60	Jordan Cowart	Jr.	ILB	5	Manti Te'o	Jr.
					54	Anthony McDonald	Sr.
PR	81	John Goodman	Sr.	S	26	Jamoris Slaughter	Sr.
	6	Theo Riddick	Jr.		17	Zeke Motta	Jr.
KR	34	George Atkinson	Fr.				
	28	Austin Collinsworth	So.				
KO	27	Kyle Brindza	Fr.				

Predictions

Allan Joseph  
Sports Editor



Purdue is not very talented. That's just a fact. Notre Dame is far and away more athletic, better-coached and more physical than the Boilermakers are — and yet, this game will be too close for comfort.

The Boilermakers have a habit of overperforming when they face the Irish. As Irish coach Brian Kelly said Wednesday, "it's their Super Bowl." The Boilermakers have a habit of making night games difficult for the Irish.

What's worse, Notre Dame has a habit of inconsistent play. It's easy to see the Irish coming out and blowing Purdue off the field, but it's even easier to see Notre Dame struggle to put away an inferior team. The Irish will win, but it will not be easy, nor will it be pretty. Don't say I didn't warn you.

Douglas Farmer  
Editor-in-Chief



September has ended. Will Notre Dame wake up?

If the Irish play as poorly as they did against Pittsburgh, Purdue will win this game. The frustrating factor is the vast talent gap between these two teams favors Notre Dame more now than it did seven years ago, possibly even more than 20 years ago.

The short version of this pent-up diatribe comes down to sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees. All summer, he thought his main concern at Ross-Ade Stadium would be staying warm on the sidelines. Obviously, not the case. His main concern now needs to be not turning the ball over.

Summer has come and passed. The Irish need to last. Hopefully October holds the answers.

Eric Prister  
Sports Writer



Notre Dame will play its fifth straight game against a team it out-matches this weekend. Purdue has struggled mightily so far this season. The Irish should have no trouble on either side of the ball, but that hasn't stopped them from losing two contests and keeping things interesting in another.

The Irish offense had trouble moving the ball against Pittsburgh, especially through the air.

Notre Dame's strength so far has been its defense, and it should have no trouble shutting down Purdue's dismal offensive attack.

Notre Dame played poorly last week, but it was the only game it has had trouble moving the ball. Things will get back on track this week, and the contest in West Lafayette won't even be close.



# o-Head

## Purdue Defense

CB	21 15	Ricardo Allen Charlton Williams	So. Sr.
DE	2 49	Gerald Gooden Aaron Brockman	Sr. Sr.
NG	93 55	Kawaan Short Brandon Taylor	Jr. So.
DT	90 61	Bruce Gaston Ryan Isaac	So. So.
DE	99 58	Ryan Russell Robert Maci	So. Jr.

FS	32 34	Albert Evans Max Charlot	Sr. Jr.
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OLB	30 18	Joe Holland Nnamdi Ezenwa	Sr. Jr.
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MLB	3 47	Dwayne Beckford Chris Carlino	Jr. Sr.
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OLB	45 39	Will Lucas Joe Gilliam	So. So.
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SS	35 44	Logan Link Landon Feichter	Sr. So.
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CB	28 10	Josh Johnson Mike Eargle	Jr. Sr.
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## Purdue Offense

WR	2 3	Justin Siller Waynelle Gravesande	Sr. Sr.
TE	82 84	Crosby Wright Justin Sinz	Jr. So.
RT	51 78	Justin Kitchens Trevor Foy	So. So.
RG	62 63	Nick Mondek James Shepherd	Sr. Sr.
C	76 59	Rick Schmeig Cody Davis	Jr. So.
LG	67 56	Peters Drey Eric McDaniel	Jr. So.
LT	68 54	Dennis Kelly Jack De Boef	Sr. So.
WR	13 83	Antavian Edison Kurt Lichtenberg	Jr. Sr.
WR	4 6	O.J. Ross Gary Bush	So. So.

### PURDUE OFFENSIVE COACHING

Danny Hope leads the Boilermakers in his third season as 3. coach and is still looking for his first victory over Notre Dame.

Hope and his assistants will try to pressure Rees throughout the game and keep a dormant Irish offense from consistently putting points on the board.

Hope knows the best chance the Boilermakers have to win is if they run the ball effectively and pressure Rees.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

### PURDUE RUSHING

The Boilermakers have accounted for nine rushing touchdowns in three games this season, and the running game has anchored the offense.

Running backs Ralph Bolden and Akeem Shavers have combined for 409 yards in those contests, along with five touchdowns.

While Marve is immobile as a quarterback, TerBush has the ability to pick up key first downs with his legs. His longest carry of the season is a 29-yarder.

The Irish rushing defense is the backbone of the unit, holding Michigan State to just 29 yards and explosive running back Ray Graham to 89 yards in Notre Dame's last two games, respectively.

Manti Te'o has 41 tackles this season to lead the Irish, 16 more than the next closest defender, Harrison Smith. Three of Te'o's stops have come for a loss.

Purdue will need a strong start from its running game if it is going to move the ball against a talented Irish defense. If the Boilermakers can force Notre Dame to put eight men in the box, TerBush and Marve will benefit from play-action passes and opportunities to get the ball to their receivers in space.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

EDGE: EVEN

### PURDUE SCHEDULE

Sept. 3 Middle Tennessee St. (W, 27-24)  
Sept. 10 @ Rice (L, 24-22)  
Sept. 17 Southeast Missouri St. (W, 59-0)  
Oct. 1 Notre Dame  
Oct. 8 Minnesota  
Oct. 15 @ Penn State  
Oct. 22 Illinois  
Oct. 29 at Michigan  
Nov. 5 @ Wisconsin  
Nov. 12 Ohio State  
Nov. 19 Iowa  
Nov. 26 @ Indiana

### PURDUE SPECIAL TEAMS

Carson Wiggs is 5-of-7 on field goal attempts during the 2011 campaign, with misses of 31 and 38 yards and a long of 50 yards.

Cody Webster has locked down the punting position after battling with Wiggs for the starting slot. Webster is averaging 49.8 yards per punt, with seven of 10 boots longer than 50 yards and five that have been downed inside the 20-yard line.

The Irish have not allowed their opponents to pick up strong field position through the return game, and they will face mediocre returners this week.

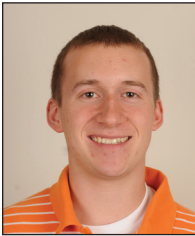
EDGE: NOTRE DAME

## Purdue Specialists

PK	37	Carson Wiggs	Sr.
P	42	Cody Webster	So.
LS	50	Jesse Schmitt	So.
PR	3	Waynelle Gravesande	Sr.
KR	4	O.J. Ross	So.
KO	37	Carson Wiggs	Sr.

### Andrew Owens

Associate Sports Editor



Is this the week Notre Dame finally corrects its mistakes and plays to its potential?

No. Right now, sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees is way too skittish in the pocket and is not showing the accuracy and game-management skills that allowed him to finish 4-0 as a starter last season and led

Irish coach Brian Kelly to pull the plug on senior quarterback Dayne Crist so early against South Florida.

The defense will allow a couple big plays, but overall will suffocate the Purdue offense primarily because of its ability to make Ralph Bolden a non-factor.

While Rees and the offense will struggle, it will not be enough to let an abysmal Boilermaker squad defeat the Irish under the lights.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 27, Purdue 13

### Chris Masoud

Assistant Managing Editor

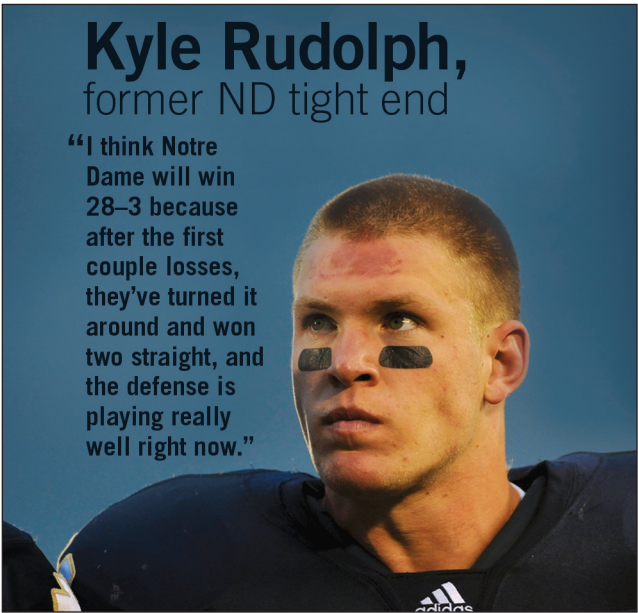


I'll be honest, I usually just mark this one up as a W before the season begins. Something about Purdue and football just don't mix like they do for basketball, and I don't see Drew Brees walking out of the Boilermakers locker room. That said, Purdue...

And I'm just going to stop there. Notre Dame should own this game

from start to finish. Tommy Rees is the de facto starter because he has a knack for winning games. He's had a total of seven starts to stop playing like a true freshman, and he'll finally look a true passer when he uses the deep ball Saturday. Brian Kelly's offense can only be vanilla for so long. The Irish begin a seven-game stretch of winnable games, and it starts with a statement win over Purdue.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 34, Purdue 13





# Running game adds new dimension to Notre Dame offense

By ALLAN JOSEPH  
Sports Editor

In 2010, Notre Dame's offense was often one-dimensional, relying almost exclusively on the passing game for much of the season. This year, however, junior running back Cierre Wood and senior running back Jonas Gray have provided a tandem ground attack that has completely erased any memories of a poor rushing offense last year. "A year ago, we were begging for 96 yards," Irish running backs coach Tim Hinton said. "Both backs are doing a great job of seeing things and getting some acceleration. Right now we're running with more force and power than a year ago."

"I like the one-two punch and I want to continue to use it that way."

After biding his time behind Armando Allen and Robert Hughes on the depth chart, Wood has finally come into his own as the primary back in the Irish offense. "It's different for him. He's never had to do it at the college level," Hinton said. "Sundays he's sore and tired. You take in the consideration of the academic load, you take in the mental preparation to get ready for a game, the physical drain on your body, and then to go out and practice, all of those things – there's a lot that goes into college football. The bottom line is that he's learning to do it better every day."

Wood attributes his success

to an increased understanding of the tactical nature of the running game.

"I got in the classroom with Coach Hinton learning the Xs and Os because that's a vital part when it comes to the game," Wood said. "There's a lot of football players who have speed and talent who can run and whatnot, but if you always give yourself that extra help, it just makes you a better player, so that's what I did."

While Hinton agrees with Wood, he also believes his feature back has a ways to go.

"He's a better student of the game," Hinton said. "We're not perfect there. We've certainly got a long way to go to get to the standards that I want him."

"We want him to become an every-down back: an every-down protection back, and an every-down receiving back ... He's learning how to do that every-down back stuff."

As the featured back, Wood has changed the way he prepares during the week to care for his body and last a full season — but that has not come easily to him.

"Last year I really wasn't a cold-plunge person but it really does work," Wood said. "I still hate it to this day. When I get in I put a towel over my head and I just bite the towel until I can't feel anything anymore. I'm going to hate it as long as they have a cold-plunge."

Wood's most important attribute, however, may have been with him all along.

"It takes great confidence to

play this game — not cockiness, but confidence," Hinton said. "I don't know that Cierre's ever lacked confidence."

Wood's backfield stablemate, Jonas Gray, had a rocky start to the season when he fumbled just outside the end zone in Notre Dame's season-opening loss to South Florida — and his fumble was returned for a touchdown that would set the Irish back early. While frustrated at the time, Hinton knew he had to give Gray an opportunity to redeem himself.

"The one thing you tell every player right off the bat is that not one play's ever going to win the game, not one play's ever going to lose the game," Hinton said. "We need him to go, so we had to put confidence back in him. Sometimes you've got to live with those mistakes. ... It has happened to everyone, what you've got to do is overcome it. The next play is the most important play."

With a 79-yard touchdown run in last week's 15-12 victory over Pittsburgh, Gray overcame his mistake with a crucial score. The touchdown scamper allowed Gray to display a speed belied by his power-back mentality. "He was juiced up to make it happen," Hinton said. "He made it happen. He's kind of struggled on making one miss, and he did a great job this time on making one miss."

While Wood and Gray have seen a significant amount of action, freshmen George Atkinson and Cam McDaniel have



SARAH O'CONNOR/The Observer

**Junior running back Cierre Wood has averaged 20.75 carries and 98.2 yards per game through Notre Dame's first four games.**

not seen the field, though not for lack of ability.

"The thing at Notre Dame is that you play a lot of good people early. The games have all been tight," Hinton said. "As a coach, you know the mistakes freshmen normally make early, and you just don't want to accept those in games as tight as ours. They both would do an outstanding job if asked to go in a game."


As the Irish enter the meat of their schedule, Hinton expects opponents will begin to focus on Wood and Gray. "The more they have success, the more they have a bulls-eye on their chest, and the more they've got to raise their

game," Hinton said.

However, Hinton said he believes his focus on the fundamentals will allow his backs to overcome any increased attention.

"You've got to go out every day and work on the little things that take you through game 12 and hopefully into game 13 and the things that you want to accomplish," he said. "We're every day trying to work on the fundamental things that will make us better. ... If we do those things, the runs will take care of themselves."

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# Boilermakers use bye to prepare for ‘Super Bowl’

By DOUGLAS FARMER  
Editor-in-Chief

Two weeks separated from a 59-0 drubbing of Southeast Missouri State, Purdue has had plenty of time to let its momentum prepare for Notre Dame.

The Boilermakers (2-1) used the first week of their two-week window for some old-fashioned rest and relaxation.

“The bye week went very well for us,” Boilermakers coach Danny Hope said Tuesday. “I think we got done what we wanted to get done. We wanted to get some rest first. After the Southeast Missouri game, [the team] had Sunday afternoon off, all of Monday, all of Tuesday, all of Wednesday. That gave them a chance to heal up a little bit, freshen up a little bit.”

When the players returned to the practice field, Hope had a Notre Dame-specific game plan waiting for them.

“It gave us a chance to put together a game plan and take it on the practice field and test it some, over and over again,” he said. “It should help us out come Saturday.”

Purdue worked through all aspects of that game plan last Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Immediately after Saturday’s practice, the Boilermakers watched the team they were preparing for.

“We practiced early [Saturday] and got out of practice in time to watch a lot of the Notre Dame [against Pittsburgh] game,” Hope said Sunday.

day. “They practiced for Notre Dame, and then got to watch Notre Dame. I like how it all worked out, a good plan.”

Looking at the Irish, Hope said he knows his defense faces a stiff challenge.

“They have great players,” he said. “That’s the real challenge for our defense, we have to spread out and match up ... They are exceptionally talented on offense.”

To open the season, Purdue squeaked by Middle Tennessee 27-24, and then lost to Rice a week later 24-22. Both teams run a spread offense similar to Notre Dame’s, and Hope’s defense had trouble coping with the inherent speed component.

“We’ve had some time to look at what we were doing and what we’ve done, and areas of our defense that we feel like we need to strengthen,” he said. “I feel like we are a lot more settled with our defensive package now, the fronts, the coverages, the pressures we’ll call.”

“We’ve improved from the Rice game to the Southeast Missouri State game, and I think we showed a lot of improvement in practice from the Southeast Missouri game heading into the Notre Dame game.”

While the defense struggles to handle a spread offense, Hope enjoys relative constancy on the offensive side of the ball. Quarterbacks Caleb TerBush and Robert Marve split the time under the center, with Hope insisting TerBush is



PAT COVENEY/The Observer

**Purdue quarterback Robert Marve dives into the end zone during Notre Dame’s 23-12 victory over Purdue in 2010. Marve is splitting time with Caleb TerBush at quarterback this year.**

the number one quarterback. Even though he relies on a dual-quarterback system, Hope feels more comfortable with his signal caller(s) than he has recently.

“Last year and the beginning of this season we had five or six starting quarterbacks in about 14 games, so to have some continuity at the quar-


terback position is very good for our football team,” Hope said. “We don’t have to make a switch. We have two quarterbacks who are ready to go and to help our team.”

With the Boilermaker defense preparing for the Tommy Rees-led spread offense, and TerBush/Marve ready to lead an offensive attack, Irish


coach Brian Kelly knows Notre Dame cannot afford to play as poorly as it did in its 15-12 victory over Pittsburgh.

“This is their Super Bowl,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said. “This is the biggest game on their schedule by far.”


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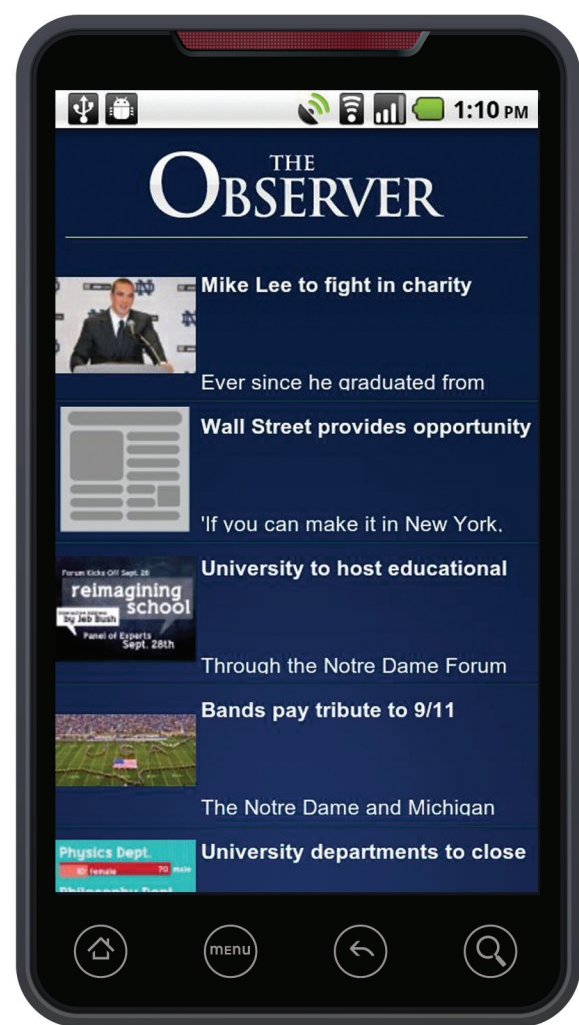
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