

# IRISH INSIDER

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Notre Dame 59, Air Force 33

## Offensive outburst

Irish offense puts together historic performance as Notre Dame improves to 4-2 with 59-33 victory

By MOLLY SAMMON  
Sports Writer

Air Force and Notre Dame combined for 92 points Saturday, lighting up the Notre Dame Stadium scoreboard like never before. Both teams combined for 1,125 total offensive yards — 565 for Air Force (3-2) and 560 for Notre Dame (4-2) — in an offensive show-and-tell.

But while the offensive output may have been close, the game was never in doubt, as Notre Dame triumphed 59-33.

“There is a lot of things coming together for us offensively with so many different outlets that ... we are getting to the point where our guys feel very confident that if they just, during the week, do the little things right, they will be able to execute on Saturday,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said.

The Irish improved their win streak to four games, tied for their longest undefeated streak under Kelly. Kelly said the Irish have not yet “arrived,” but they are getting there.

“We have made progress to the level where we know what it looks like on the other end, but there’s still so many areas to iron out,” Kelly said. “We have got to get more consistent on special teams. We have glimmers of really good play. We have got to obviously tighten things down defensively with our younger guys, and then just play with more consistency. Four in a row is not enough for this group, you know, but I like the direction that we are going.”

Some early successful offensive drives on the field allowed the Irish to explore new parts of their roster. The Irish opened the scoring just 2:47 into the game when senior wide receiver Michael Floyd jumped for a 34-yard pass from sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees.

“We started off fast. Michael Floyd set the table for us early on and that’s probably why he’s one of the best, if not the best receiver in the country,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said. “The touchdown pass where he went over the top in man-to-man coverage kind of gave us

*“Four in a row is not enough for this group, you know, but I like the direction that we are going.”*

**Brian Kelly**  
Irish coach



GRANT TOBIN/The Observer

Senior running back Jonas Gray weaves through the Air Force defense during Notre Dame’s 59-33 victory Saturday. Gray finished with 69 yards rushing on just seven carries, averaging 9.9 yards per carry.

that momentum.”

By the end of the first quarter, sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees passed for three touchdowns to three different receivers. Aside from Floyd, junior tight end Tyler Eifert and junior wide receiver Robby Toma found the end zone to build a 21-3 breakaway lead from which the Irish would never look back. The final touchdown of the quarter was Toma’s first career touchdown reception.

“A team like Air Force, they are a team that runs the ball a lot, and if you can get up

early and speed their game up a little bit, it’s big for us,” Rees said.

Rees completed 23 of his 32 passes for a total of 261 yards, with four touchdowns and no turnovers.

“He’s growing as he goes here,” Kelly said. “He’s 8-1 as a starter and he continues to grow and develop, and we are seeing that maturity. [Rees] got flushed out of the pocket a couple of times, threw the ball away, made some very good decisions in pressure situations when something wasn’t there. He’s just developing, maturing.”

Rees split time with sophomore quarterback Andrew Hendrix who completed all four of his pass attempts, adding 33 pass yards of his own to Notre Dame’s overall 294.

Hendrix was also the leading rusher on the day at the quarterback position with 111 yards. He earned 78 of those with 6:44 left in the fourth

quarter when he broke away from the Falcon defense only to be tripped up two yards short of the goal line. Freshman running back George Atkinson rushed the ball in from the two-yard line for a 59-19 lead before the Irish gave up two touchdowns to Air Force in the final minutes of the game.

Hendrix’s performance at the quarterback position does not change senior Dayne Crist’s spot on the depth chart, but his playing time suggested he provides some security in that part of Notre Dame’s roster.

“Andrew [Hendrix] does not have all of the grasp of the offense, everything that he needs. But he certainly is somebody that can go in the game and can do some very good things,” Kelly said. “We featured six different formations for him, and it’s a package that can continue to grow with him.”

Aside from competitive

play, the Irish sported pink armbands in honor of breast cancer awareness. The cause is particularly dear to Notre Dame as Kelly’s wife and Rees’ mother are both survivors of the disease.

After six straight games and four straight wins, the Irish head into a bye weekend that Kelly hopes will give them enough recuperation time without sacrificing any of their recent success.

“I think we need it. We need a break,” Kelly said. “This break comes at a good time for our guys to get home and see their families a little bit. So any momentum that is lost in that is gained by our guys getting a chance to get home.”

With a week’s break from games and a week off from classes, the Irish continue their season against USC on Oct. 22 in the first home night game in over two decades.

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### player of the game

**Jamoris Slaughter**  
Notre Dame safety

*By forcing two turnovers in the first half, Slaughter allowed the Irish to jump out to the early lead they would not give up.*

### stat of the game

**8.6 yards per play**

*The Irish averaged nearly nine yards per play throughout the game on their way to a historic offensive effort.*

### play of the game

**Jamoris Slaughter’s forced fumble in the first quarter**

*Slaughter’s forced fumble allowed Notre Dame to open up a two-possession lead and forced Air Force to play from behind all game.*

### quote of the game

*“Everyone is picking up their game, and I think the score today [shows] that.”*

**Theo Riddick**  
Notre Dame receiver



report card

A-

quarterbacks: Tommy Rees threw for four touchdowns and didn't turn the ball over, and Andrew Hendrix impressed in his debut. Rees did miss a few wide-open receivers.

A

running backs: Jonas Gray and Cierre Wood reeled off big runs all day, averaging nearly eight yards per carry. Cam McDaniel and George Atkinson finally saw the field as running backs.

A

receivers: It was another great effort from the receiving corps, who accounted for four touchdowns. Theo Riddick finally broke out, and Michael Floyd was his usual unstoppable self.

A

offensive line: This offensive line has quietly turned into one of the team's best units. The line cleared the way for 266 yards on the ground and didn't allow a single sack.

B-

defensive line: It's good the Irish jumped out to an early lead, because without Ethan Johnson, the line struggled to contain the triple option when Air Force could afford to run the ball.

B

linebackers: The outside linebackers seemed to constantly be missing against the triple option, but Manti Te'o and Darius Fleming picked up the slack nicely.

B+

defensive backs: Jamoris Slaughter forced two critical early turnovers, and Robert Blanton was excellent against the run. Still, the secondary struggled to keep receivers in front of them.

A-

special teams: No missed field goals. No turnovers. No terrible punts. It wasn't spectacular, but considering previous special teams performances, this is nearly cause for celebration.

B+

coaching: The Irish still struggled to defend the triple option, but the offense was nearly unstoppable all day. Even better, Notre Dame fixed most of its special teams miscues.

3.52

overall: If the offense keeps playing like this, Notre Dame can beat nearly anyone. The defense is still strong, but the triple-option struggles are cause for worry.

adding up the numbers

For the second game in a row, the Irish did not turn the ball over. Notre Dame had 15 turnovers in its first three games.

0

9.2

The Irish averaged 9.2 yards per carry on the ground, helped in large part by Andrew Hendrix's 78-yard scamper.

Notre Dame scored a touchdown on each of its six first-half possessions on its way to 42 first-half points.

6

21

The 42 first-half points were the most in any half by an Irish team in 21 years, dating back to 1990 against Navy.

Hendrix's 78-yard touchdown run was the second-longest run by a quarterback in Notre Dame history.

78

5

The Irish offensive line has given up just five sacks this season, but allowed none Saturday.

COURTNEY ECKERLE/The Observer

Senior cornerback Robert Blanton jumps on senior safety Jamoris Slaughter after Slaughter intercepted a Tim Jefferson pass in the second quarter. Slaughter also forced a fumble in the first quarter.

# It was a boring game, but boring is good

Only one word can describe Saturday's second half: Boring.

Actually, let's use three: Really, really boring.

It was delightful.

Less than 11 minutes into the first quarter, Notre Dame held a 21-3 lead. At halftime, six Irish possessions had yielded six Irish touchdowns and a 42-16 lead over Air Force.

One week after a 38-10 romp in West Lafayette, Saturday's 59-33 victory brought the phrase "with ease" to a new level. The final 30 minutes saw more yawns than points, even though there were 34 points.

Talk about a good problem to have.

It has been a long time since Notre Dame dominated two consecutive opponents. The closest the Irish came last season was a 28-3 win over Utah one week followed by a 27-3 triumph over Army. In both instances, a fourth quarter comeback remained possible, if not probable. These last two weeks, comebacks bordered on the impossible.

In three out of this season's first four games, Irish fans fought off cardiac arrest. Five games last year came down to one possession. These frequent ulcer-inducing weekends have been routine since Lou Holtz left Notre Dame in 1996 — coincidentally, his final home game was the last time the Irish

scored more than 59 points, a 62-0 victory over Rutgers.

This two-week old habit is much preferred to the handfuls of antacids campus has needed for more than a decade.

In place of screaming to the final play, the student section enjoyed the luxuries of a well-received "wave." (Though it should be noted, the northwest corner of the Stadium failed in its attempts to begin a double wave.) Perhaps this trend will continue, and an opportunity will be granted in two weeks under the lights against USC.

In lieu of questioning sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees, or before him senior Dayne Crist, the postgame press conference was filled with questions leading to praise of sophomore quarterback Andrew Hendrix, who took the first snaps of his collegiate career.

Rather than wonder why senior receiver Michael Floyd had such trouble getting open, fans wondered what record he broke this week. Floyd did not break any, however, as he has already broken all, or at least nearly all, of them. Instead, the All-American tried his hand at fielding punts, seemingly just for the fun of it.

Welcome to boring. Isn't it lovely?

With 6:22 left in the fourth quarter, Notre Dame held a 40-point lead. Air Force needed five touchdowns and five converted two-point conversions to catch the Irish. It just wasn't going to happen.

Instead of worrying about another late defensive collapse, Irish fans enjoyed the raw talent displayed by Hendrix, freshman running back George Atkinson and

the entire third-string defense.

Only the occasional Air Force fourth-down attempt, and subsequent conversion, reminded fans a competitive game was ongoing, if not all that competitive.

Boring is beautiful. Usually, when students reach the second half, their impending hangovers make loud noises a nuisance. Saturday, the impending hangovers simply made the 248 aerial pushups that much more comical.

When Officer Tim McCarthy comes on the Stadium address system before the fourth quarter, he normally provides a moment of levity during a stressful game. His "strike out" pun this week may have been the most serious moment of the second half.

The sight of stands emptying was not a result of storms. It was the sight of disinterest, hunger and, well, boredom.

Notre Dame fans should take interest in the young players taking the field at the end of the game. Hendrix, Atkinson and company will be playing the opening half in the years to come.

Notre Dame fans should hit the concession stands a bit harder. Or slip some snacks into their pockets before entering the Stadium.

And Notre Dame fans should get used to boring. It seems it may be here to stay.

At that point, only two words are needed to sum up Saturday: Delightfully boring.

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

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# Riddick finally has breakout game



GRANT TOBIN/The Observer  
Junior receiver Theo Riddick tries to break an Air Force tackle during Notre Dame's 59-33 victory Saturday. Riddick had his best game of the season, catching eight passes for 83 yards and a touchdown.

By ANDREW GASTELUM  
Sports Writer

Many have criticized junior wide receiver Theo Riddick for underperformance this season, but as far as he is concerned, winning is all that matters.

Dropped passes have plagued the junior receiver, and he has been the third option in the offense at times. But sometimes struggle is a part of the game, even if it means a zero-catch performance in a 38-10 blow-out win over Purdue on Oct. 1, Riddick said.

"[Not catching the ball] didn't really affect me," Riddick said. "I mean, we won and I came here to win games, and that's what we are doing, so it feels good."

"You just have to be patient, especially in that spread offense. As long as you are patient, everyone gets their turn."

Riddick's turn came Saturday, grabbing eight receptions — including three in the first quarter — for 84 yards and a touchdown. But for Irish coach Brian Kelly, it was just another twist to an already multifaceted offense.

"I just think some guys go with the flow," Kelly said. "[Theo] definitely needs some mojo — some good mojo — and it helps when you can run reverses with him, some handoff

sweeps, some screen gain. So we are going to continue to have that and feature it in our offense."

That "mojo" was on display from the very first drive Saturday when the offense targeted Riddick three consecutive times in the first six plays of the game. Sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees said getting Riddick involved early was an integral part of the game plan.

"He's such a dynamic player. Getting the ball in his hands ¾ good things happen," Rees said. "There were more options to give him the ball, and all week he and I did a good job of staying on the same page and making sure we connect ... He's a team guy and doesn't really care as long as we win, but [there was] a little more emphasis of getting the ball in his hands and letting him go out and make some plays."

Kelly echoed the importance of getting the ball to Riddick, who mixes electrifying speed with creative dynamism to create a lethal combination for the spread offense.

"I've been trying to tell you guys that he's pretty good," Kelly said. "Just when he gets his chances, he runs so hard. He is a difficult guy when he gets the ball in his hands. And obviously there was a concern on my part to make sure he got some touches and got into a good flow."

Riddick exhibited his elusiveness with 32 seconds left in the first half on a 24-yard touchdown reception — his first since the 35-31 loss at Michigan on Sept. 10.

Starting from the Air Force 24-yard line, the New Jersey native outran his defender on a crossing route before catching a pass from Rees just a yard past the line of scrimmage. The converted running back proceeded to juke one defender and broke two more tackles in powerful fashion before diving into the end zone.

"Sometimes I still feel like a running back when I get out there and have to lower a shoulder fighting for a first down," Riddick said. "It feels good looking for that contact and I kind of miss it. I just happened to be open and Tommy took full advantage of it. I was just happy to come in today and showcase my talent and help this team win."

Riddick may want to show off his talents again, but it is more important to him that the Irish continue to ride this hot streak.

"We've won four straight, and we hope to continue the trend," Riddick said. "I think we started out a little too slow, and I think it showed. Everyone is picking their game up as you can see, and I think the score today showed that."

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# Irish score most since Holtz finale

By ANDREW GASTELUM  
Sports Writer

Notre Dame's 59 points were the most points scored since Lou Holtz's last game home game as head coach Nov. 23, 1996, when the Irish defeated Rutgers, 62-0. The teams' combined total of 92 points was the most in Notre Dame Stadium history. The previous mark was 90 points in a 46-44 triple-overtime loss to Navy in 2007.

**Spreading the wealth**

Seven different Irish players scored touchdowns, including the first career touchdown for junior wide receiver Robby Toma. Toma's touchdown reception came on a 10-yard pass from sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees with 4:07 left in

the first quarter.

**Ground game beats Air Force**

The Irish rushed for three touchdowns and 266 yards on 29 carries, led by Hendrix's 111 yards. Notre Dame has rushed for 735 yards in its last three games, the most since rushing for 804 yards in a three-game span against Navy, BYU and Stanford in 2003. Jonas Gray's two touchdowns gave him four touchdowns in the last three games after being scoreless in the first 25 games of his career.

**Run, Andrew, run**

Sophomore quarterback Andrew Hendrix's 78-yard run with 8:22 left in the game was the second longest run by an Irish quarterback, one-yard behind Bill Eder's 79-yard

touchdown run against Navy in 1969.

**Holding onto the ball**

Notre Dame has played two consecutive games without committing a turnover after turning the ball over 15 times in its first three games. The Irish defense has also forced a turnover on their opponents' first play from scrimmage in the last two games. Against Purdue on Oct. 1, fifth-year senior cornerback Gary Gray intercepted a pass on the first play of the game, while senior safety Jamoris Slaughter forced a fumble against Air Force three minutes into the game Saturday.

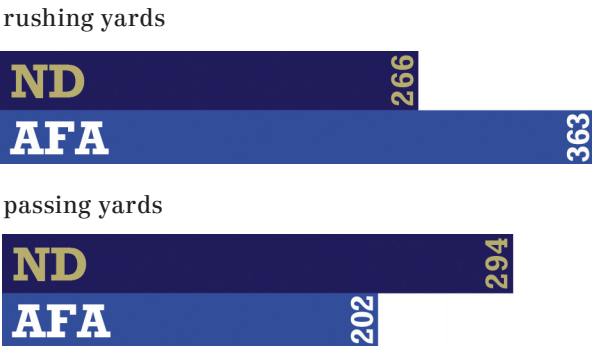
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# scoring summary

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total
AFA	3	13	0	17	33
ND	21	21	7	10	59

- First quarter**  
Notre Dame 7, Air Force 0  
Michael Floyd 34-yd pass from Tommy Rees (David Ruffer kick) with 12:13 remaining  
Drive: 8 plays, 81 yards, 3:06 elapsed
- Notre Dame 14, Air Force 0  
Tyler Eifert 5-yd pass from Tommy Rees (David Ruffer kick) with 8:21 remaining  
Drive: 9 plays, 59 yards, 3:33 elapsed
- Notre Dame 14, Air Force 3  
Parker Harrington 34-yd field goal with 5:48 remaining  
Drive: 8 plays, 64 yards, 2:33 elapsed
- Notre Dame 21, Air Force 3  
Robby Toma 10-yd pass from Tommy Rees (David Ruffer kick) with 4:07 remaining  
Drive: 4 plays, 51 yards, 1:41 elapsed
- Second quarter**  
Notre Dame 21, Air Force 9  
Tim Jefferson 3-yd rush (Parker Harrington kick blocked by Darius Fleming) with 13:41 remaining  
Drive: 14 plays, 80 yards, 5:26 elapsed
- Notre Dame 28, Air Force 9  
Jonas Gray 5-yd rush (David Ruffer kick) with 11:39 remaining  
Drive: 5 plays, 38 yards, 2:02 elapsed
- Notre Dame 35, Air Force 9  
Cierre Wood 8-yd rush (David Ruffer kick) with 6:10 remaining  
Drive: 6 plays, 44 yards, 2:27 elapsed
- Notre Dame 35, Air Force 16  
Ty MacArthur 6-yd pass from Tim Jefferson (Parker Harrington kick) with 1:41 remaining  
Drive: 12 plays, 80 yards, 4:29 elapsed
- Notre Dame 42, Air Force 16  
Theo Riddick 24-yd pass from Tommy Rees (David Ruffer kick) with 0:32 remaining  
Drive: 6 plays, 74 yards, 1:09 elapsed
- Third quarter**  
Notre Dame 49, Air Force 16  
Jonas Gray 6-yd rush (David Ruffer kick) with 1:54 remaining  
Drive: 6 plays, 64 yards, 1:54 elapsed
- Fourth quarter**  
Notre Dame 49, Air Force 19  
Parker Harrington 32-yd field goal with 14:56 remaining  
Drive: 18 plays, 54 yards, 6:53 elapsed
- Notre Dame 52, Air Force 19  
David Ruffer 39-yd field goal with 10:12 remaining  
Drive: 9 plays, 56 yards, 4:44 elapsed
- Notre Dame 59, Air Force 19  
George Atkinson 1-yd run (Mike Grieco kick) with 6:22 remaining  
Drive: 4 plays, 80 yards, 2:00 elapsed
- Notre Dame 59, Air Force 27  
Drew Coleman 36-yd pass from Connor Dietz (Anthony Lacoste rush) with 4:32 remaining  
Drive: 4 plays, 74 yards, 1:50 elapsed
- Notre Dame 59, Air Force 33  
Jonathan Lee 8-yd rush (Broam Hart rush failed) with 0:33 remaining  
Drive: 7 plays, 67 yards, 1:41 elapsed

# statistics







GRANT TOBIN/The Observer



MACKENZIE SAIN/The Observer

# High-flying offense

On a sunny October Saturday in Notre Dame Stadium, the Irish offense exploded in historic fashion, scoring 59 points in its highest-scoring performance since 1996. Notre Dame tallied 21 points in the first quarter and added another 21 in the second quarter, racking up a 42-16 halftime lead. Notre Dame would later extend its advantage to 59-19 before giving up late touchdowns with the outcome a foregone conclusion. With the win, the Irish improve to 4-2 after dropping their first two games. Notre Dame now has a bye week before hosting USC in the first home night game in over two decades.



COURTNEY ECKERLE/The Observer



GRANT TOBIN/The Observer



MACKENZIE SAIN/The Observer

Clockwise from top: linebacker Darius Fleming fights past an Air Force defender; quarterback Tommy Rees hands off to junior running back Cierre Wood; junior tight end Tyler Eifert fights for yardage; Wood scores a touchdown; sophomore quarterback Andrew Hendrix runs from an Air Force defender during his 78-yard rush.