

# IRISH INSIDER

FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2012

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OBSERVER

COMPTON FAMILY  
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COMPTON

## COMMENTARY

# New arena signals the arrival of Irish hockey

Gold helmets shining. An exclusive national TV contract. A raucous student section filling a sold-out venue. A perennial national championship contender. No, it's not football. It's the newest marquee sport at Notre Dame — hockey.



Allan Joseph

Sports Editor

For decades, the hockey program had a spirited but limited reach. The late coach Lefty Smith built the foundations of a program that persist to this day, including a rare focus on academics. But while North Dakota, Boston College and Minnesota built cavernous arenas matching the size of their programs, the Irish languished in the Joyce Center for 44 years, and the program with them.

In 2005, though, things began to change when Irish coach Jeff Jackson took the helm. In his first season, Jackson took the Irish from cellar-dwellers to the middle of the pack. In his second, he led Notre Dame to its first-ever NCAA tournament win, and in his third, its first-ever Frozen Four.

Now, coming off the program's second Frozen Four appearance and first-ever preseason No. 1 ranking, the Irish finally have the resource that takes them from upstart program to established power. After years of recruiting in spite of the Joyce Center, Jackson now has to do no more for a highly prized recruit than to give him a tour of the Compton Family Ice Arena.

The state-of-the-art arena is nothing short of jaw-dropping — from the locker room to the player lounge, from the secondary Olympic rink to the detailed layout of the equipment room, every touch was put in place with the express purpose of giving Notre Dame hockey the best possible home. Jackson designed the layout of the benches to give the Irish

a home-ice advantage; equipment manager Dave Gilbert designed the stick-preparation room to be right off the ice for mid-game preparation; even sports information director Tim Connor had a hand in designing the press box to maximize media exposure.

The new arena is a thoughtfully-designed venue meant to make Notre Dame hockey players the best they can be in an environment as quintessentially collegiate as any; that is, it's a reflection of how Jackson has designed his program. Now, he finally has the resources to back up his recruiting pitch.

The future of Notre Dame hockey is bright, and there are more changes ahead as the Irish move to the Hockey East in 2013 after the CCHA's disbanding. But at this pivotal moment in the program's history, it's easy to forget about the present — and this season presents an opportunity to make more memories than just a thrilling Dedication Game victory over Boston College.

If the young squad can put aside its inconsistency, if junior goalkeeper Mike Johnson can find a way to again play his best late in the season, if sophomore Anders Lee can break out of his midseason scoring slump, this squad has the potential to go farther than any Irish squad before it, announcing Notre Dame's arrival for good in a far bigger way than any arena could.

So the Irish host Michigan in a hard-hitting matchup of top-ten teams at night, in front of a packed arena, on national TV. The winner will see its national championship hopes brighten, and tensions will be high. Gold helmets will face off against winged helmets, and the game will probably go down to the very end.

No, it's not football. It's Notre Dame hockey, and it's here to stay.

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

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# ND, Michigan to renew rivalry



GRANT TOBIN/The Observer

Irish junior center Riley Sheahan fights for the puck behind the net during Notre Dame's 2-1 loss to Northeastern on Dec. 3. Sheahan is suspended for Friday's game against Michigan.

By CHRIS ALLEN  
Sports Writer

Fresh off two defeats to Western Michigan, the No. 6 Irish look to rebound in the CCHA when they take the ice in one of college hockey's biggest rivalries for a pair of home contests against No. 10 Michigan.

Both Notre Dame (13-8-3, 8-5-3-0 CCHA) and the Wolverines (14-8-4, 8-6-4-1 CCHA) competed in last season's Frozen Four, but periods of inconsistency have placed both teams a handful of points behind conference pace-setters No. 5 Ohio State and No. 8 Western Michigan in the CCHA race. With Michigan sitting just two points ahead of the Irish, senior defenseman and captain Sean Lorenz emphasized the importance of a good showing this weekend.

"It's a huge weekend to stay in the race," Lorenz said. "The CCHA is definitely one of the best leagues in the country right now, and everybody's doing well. Every game's going to be a battle, and we can't afford to lose games, so we need to come out strong."

Notre Dame enters the contest on the heels of a pair of disappointing defeats to Western Michigan. The Irish dropped a pair of 3-2 and 3-1 decisions as the Broncos com-

pleted the first series sweep of the Irish since February 2010.

Despite the losses, Lorenz downplayed concern and said the losses have refocused the team in practice.

"[Western Michigan is] a good team; they're going to end up in the [NCAA] tournament. We can play better hockey and we know it," he said. "You've got to feel comfortable going into this weekend and know that we can do well."

An improvement in shooting will be a focus for Irish coach Jeff Jackson's squad going into the crucial Michigan series. Notre Dame outshot Western Michigan in both of last weekend's contests, but failed to keep pace on the scoreboard.

Lorenz said efficiency on the offensive end will be a top team goal this weekend.

"We didn't bury our chances against Western Michigan," he said. "We had a lot of scoring chances, and we actually outchanced them in both games, but we couldn't put the puck in the net. We have to get back to scoring five-on-five goals."

The Irish will be without junior center Riley Sheahan for Friday's game due to a one-game suspension for an illegal hit delivered against Western Michigan on Jan. 13. Sheahan

will be eligible to return Saturday.

Seemingly always one of the top teams in the conference, as well as the country, Michigan enters the game coming off a sweep of conference leader Ohio State. The play of senior goalie Shawn Hunwick, who brings a 0.50 goals against average, leads a dangerous Michigan squad hitting the final stretch of the season.

"Michigan is coming in hot. They're one of the hottest teams in our league right now," Lorenz said. "Watching film of them, they're also skating well now, and that's going to be a big point of emphasis this week, heading into the weekend. We're going to make sure we try and skate with them."

The atmosphere at the Compton Family Ice Arena will also be noteworthy in the first and only regular-season matchup between the two teams this season. Friday night marks the first installment of the "White Out" promotion taking place in the new arena.

Lorenz said the team is aware of the potential for heightened intensity in the building.

"We need to rebound this weekend against Michigan," Lorenz said. "What a weekend to rebound. It's a huge rivalry. Their fans will be going nuts and we have the White Out."

The puck will drop at 7:35 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday nights. NBC Sports Network will broadcast Friday's game nationally, while CBS Sports Network will broadcast Saturday's match-up.

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# A brand new barn

Compton Family Ice Arena becomes most recent addition to campus thanks to generosity of donors

By MATTHEW DeFRANKS  
Sports Writer

Open the door.

Open the door to new tradition, coupled with a storied history. Open the door to a majestic stairway accented by brick, blue and gold. Open the door to two rinks, two Frozen Four banners and 5,022 seats.

Whatever you do, please just open the door to the newly opened Compton Family Ice Arena.

The new \$50 million home of the Irish hockey team was made possible by a generous lead donation of \$15 million from Kevin and Gayla Compton, whose son Cameron graduated from Notre Dame in 2010.

"Our family has been involved in the community for some time and hockey is a love of ours personally," Gayla Compton said. "More than anything, we were actually interested in the students having a place to be, the community having a place to gather and making it a good experience for everyone."

Compton said the idea originated in 2007, when Cameron, then a sophomore, told the family about waiting outside in the cold for hockey tickets, often times not able to get in. Compton cited an apparent student passion and love for the sport as motivation for the donation.

Despite the idea's emergence in 2007, the Compton family had to wait four more years to see its dream come to fruition. Gayla said she first stepped into the new, finished arena in October.

"I walked in and I couldn't move for a while," she said. "I just stood there, I'm sure with my mouth open. It was better than I could have imagined, than I could have planned. All the pieces had come together so well. We're so happy to be a part of that. It was beyond what we thought it would be, and we thought a lot."

The exterior of the building is imposing yet graceful, complementing the other structures on campus with its Gothic brick design.

"I got misty [when I walked inside]," Gayla said. "Outside, it looks like it's been there forever. I'm so pleased with the architects and how they managed to fit it in with the rest of the university. I walked in and the lights and the warmth of the place were welcoming. It was very welcoming."

## Multidimensional building

While housing the No. 6 Irish hockey team appears to be the main purpose of the state-of-the-art building, the facility does so much more. The arena also hosts the figure skating club, the women's hockey club team, public skates, intramural broomball and hockey games, junior hockey tournaments and various community events.

"You've got four teams playing hockey and four teams waiting to go on for the next games. You've got recreational skating. You've got people renting it for community parties," Notre Dame Director of Athletics Jack Swarbrick told The Observer in



SUZANNA PRATT/The Observer

The Compton Family Ice Arena, pictured during Notre Dame's 5-2 inaugural win over RPI on Oct. 22, has replaced the Joyce Center as the new home of the Irish.

December. "So it's not just that it's a great home for our hockey program and a great place to go and cheer for them, it's that it's getting the sort of community use that we envisioned for it."

Compton said a welcoming environment was a must for the arena.

"Our family believes very strongly in it being a place where one feels welcome," Compton said. "It has to be efficient. It has to be clean. It has to be neat. It has to be open. Those things are important. Our vision was a place where students, hockey players, amateurs, beginners — everyone — can be a part of a gathering place."

The Compton family, which also owns the NHL's San Jose Sharks, was very involved in the design process. Notre Dame sent a design team to San Jose to use the HP Pavilion as a model for what the Compton Family Ice Arena could look like.

Gayla said the idea was not to copy from the established arena, but to grow from it.

"[Having an arena already] had a huge effect, being able to start with a few ideas and know how they can work better definitely gave us insight," she said. "We were able to say, 'This works well for us,' or, 'This could be improved for us.'"

She said the design of hockey specific items, such as Zamboni entrances, were aided by the knowledge that comes from owning an NHL franchise.

While the Sharks enjoy the luxury of having an arena to call their own, Notre Dame did not. The Irish used to play in the

north dome of the Joyce Center, a building shared by various other teams and a cramped space for a top-tier hockey program.

The new building, however, still has a few relics from the Joyce Center. Lining the wall overlooking the Olympic-sized rink are award plaques from the tiny hallway outside the locker room in their old home.

Gayla said an old bench from the Joyce Center was carried over and given a facelift with a fresh coat of paint.

## Electric atmosphere

Since the move to the Compton Family Ice Arena in October of last year, the Irish are 7-3 in their new home, including wins over No. 3 Boston University, No. 4 Boston College and No. 8 Western Michigan.

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Gayla Compton  
Donor

The 3-2 overtime win over Boston College on Nov. 18, however, stands out from the rest. In the facility's official dedication game, sophomore right wing Bryan Rust scored the winning goal with just 1.1 seconds remaining in overtime. The Comptons, along with other donors, were in attendance to witness Rust's game-winner.

"It was over the top," Gayla said of the game. "I couldn't have had scripted it better. It was crazy. It was wonderful."

The win also marked one of four sellouts this year at the Compton Family Ice Arena. Irish coach Jeff Jackson was pleased not only with the result, but also with the crowd's support.

"Tonight was everything we hoped this building would be," Jackson said after the game.

"I thought I saw it [in the inaugural game] against RPI. It reminded me of [Michigan's] Yost Arena, which is something I've always aspired to have, that kind of environment in a college hockey game."

The game served as the perfect backdrop for "Onward to Victory: Notre Dame Hockey," a documentary that aired on the new NBC Sports Network on Dec. 31. The movie chronicled Notre Dame's move from the Joyce Center to Compton Family Ice Arena and the dedication game from a behind-the-scenes angle seen by few.

Notre Dame hockey's partnership with NBC, however, is not over. Along with Notre Dame's move to Hockey East in 2013, a new television deal with the network was put into place that could include the airing all Irish home games. The Compton Family Ice Arena has proved to be a television-friendly venue that played a vital role in the deal.

While the main rink has now housed the top seven crowds in Notre Dame hockey history, the auxiliary Olympic-sized rink downstairs serves as a vital preparation tool for the Irish. Jackson has called the practice rink a bonus when preparing for road games at arenas with wider sheets.

Gayla said that her favorite part of the arena right now is the ground floor, an area that holds both the pro shop and the Olympic-sized rink.

"I love seeing the figure skaters. I love seeing the kids. It just knocks my socks off," Compton said. "That is probably my favorite spot knowing that anyone can come in and take advantage."

She added that while the arena has exceeded the family's lofty expectations for now, she is not opposed to future additions to the building.

So open the door. Even if it has already been opened for you.



SUZANNA PRATT/The Observer

Notre Dame and RPI prepare for the first ever faceoff at the Compton Family Ice Arena. The Irish are 7-3 in the new facility.

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# Former coach 'Lefty' Smith passes away, leaves legacy

By JACK HEFFERON  
Sports Writer

When No. 6 Notre Dame takes the ice against No. 10 Michigan this weekend, it will be just another step for a team that has become a powerhouse in college hockey. The program has now seen a pair of regular-season CCHA championships and Frozen Four appearances, sent dozens of alumni to the NHL and recently unveiled a new arena, a move to Hockey East and an expanded television deal.

But while the Irish continue to move towards the future, the entire Notre Dame community mourns the loss of Charles 'Lefty' Smith, the man who took the program's first step over 40 years ago.

Notre Dame hockey began in earnest with Smith, who in 1968 coached Notre Dame's first varsity hockey team. He guided and built up the program through its first 19 seasons, amassing 307 wins. After his retirement from coaching in 1987, he continued to work steadfastly for the University as the facilities manager at the Loftus Sports Center. Earlier this month, Smith retired from his post after 44 years in the athletic department, making him its longest tenured employee. Three days later, at the age of 81, he died at home of natural causes.

For those at Notre Dame who knew Smith, his impact on the University over six decades is difficult to quantify.

"It is difficult to imagine Notre Dame without Charles 'Lefty' Smith," Notre Dame Director of Athletics Jack Swarbrick said in a statement after Smith's passing. "From the time I attended my first hockey game as a freshman to the time I spent with him at his retirement par-

ty a few weeks ago, Lefty had been a prominent, colorful and impactful fixture at our University. Lefty's legacy will be measured not so much in the program he built or the games he won, but rather the thousands of lives he touched as a coach, teacher, administrator, father and husband."

And while Smith's death sent waves throughout the entire Notre Dame family, his loss was felt especially hard in the locker room of the team he gave life to.

"We wouldn't be who we are or have what we have if it wasn't for Lefty. He started the program and gave it life, and was a great ambassador for the University and for college hockey," Irish coach Jeff Jackson said. "There's so many great coaches in the early era ... guys that really started college hockey, and Lefty was a big part of that."

As one of the founding fathers of modern college hockey, Smith's legacy was honored across the tight-knit hockey community. Legendary announcer Doc Emrick paid homage to Lefty during an NHL broadcast on NBC, and condolences poured in from coaches, players and fans alike.

Perhaps the most special tribute to Smith came when the Irish travelled to Minnesota just a few days after Smith's passing. Jackson said that Lefty had always had an open invitation to travel with the team, and Smith had planned to make the Minnesota game his first trip. Over 10,000 Gopher fans packed into Mariucci Arena for the highly anticipated top-five matchup, but before the puck dropped, the arena halted and observed a moment of silence for the late Notre Dame coach.

Playing an inspired brand of hockey, the Irish came out



Photo courtesy of Notre Dame Athletics

**Former Irish coach Charles 'Lefty' Smith passed away Jan. 3 of natural causes. Smith amassed 307 wins and coached six All-Americans during his 19 seasons at the helm of Irish hockey.**

strong and grabbed an early 4-1 lead. Minnesota mounted a late charge, but Notre Dame held on to win one for Lefty, 4-3.

"Coach Jackson talked to us pregame, and I think it was in the back of guy's minds that this was a game we wanted to win for Lefty," Irish senior forward and captain Billy Maday said. "He left a great legacy, and we wanted to do him right."

And as Smith was such a force behind the bench in the Joyce Center, it is fitting that he will forever be a part of the new Compton Family Ice Arena. When the Irish play the Wolverines this weekend, the game

will take place on the Lefty Smith Rink.

Smith was able to participate in the facility's dedication in November, and Smith's role in the mission and history of Notre Dame was not lost on the Compton family.

"He was the pinnacle of not just Notre Dame hockey, but of Notre Dame," Gayla Compton said. "He was loved. It's one thing to love a university, but to have the same university love him back with such intensity and such sincerity [is incredible]."

So Notre Dame will move forward as a program, starting with this weekend's series

against its archrival. Playoffs and championships will come again, and the team will continue to play, even without their old coach watching from his usual perch in the press box. But as long as the Irish take to the rink named after their program's patriarch, his presence will still be felt.

"Lefty's always going to be with us," Jackson said. "He left a mark on a lot of people's lives. As long as we're in this arena, and we wear the Notre Dame jerseys and the golden helmets, he's always going to be there."

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## CCHA Standings

Team	CONFERENCE					OVERALL		
	W	L	T	SW	Pts	W	L	T
No. 5 <b>Ohio State</b>	10	5	3	1	34	14	6	3
No. 8 <b>Western Michigan</b>	9	4	3	3	33	12	7	5
No. 10 <b>Michigan</b>	8	6	4	1	29	14	8	4
<b>Lake Superior State</b>	8	8	2	2	28	13	10	3
No. 6 <b>Notre Dame</b>	8	5	3	0	27	13	8	3
<b>Miami</b>	8	8	2	1	27	12	10	2
No. 14 <b>Ferris State</b>	8	6	2	0	26	14	8	2
<b>Michigan State</b>	7	7	2	2	25	12	9	3
<b>Northern Michigan</b>	6	7	5	2	25	10	8	5
<b>Alaska</b>	4	10	4	2	18	7	11	4