

IRISH INSIDER

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2012



THREE-HEADED MONSTER

CIERRE WOOD, THEO RIDDICK
AND GEORGE ATKINSON GET
THE IRISH OFFENSE RUNNING

THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Suzanna Pratt and Brandon Keelean

COMMENTARY

A conversation about Michigan



Allan Joseph
Editor-in-Chief



Chris Allen
Sports Editor

Editor's Note: Shortly after Notre Dame's 20-3 victory over Michigan State, Editor-in-Chief Allan Joseph sent Sports Editor Chris Allen an email, sparking a discussion about this week's contest against Michigan and beyond. What follows is a lightly edited transcript of their conversation.

Allan Joseph: Chris, what just happened?

Chris Allen: I'm not quite sure. Are the Irish ... good?

AJ: I think they might be. And I don't mean qualify-for-the-Sun-Bowl-and-finish-with-eight-wins good. I mean have-an-outside-shot-at-the-BCS good. That is not exactly what I thought six hours ago, to say the least. But that performance — that dominating, complete, astonishing performance against a very good Michigan State squad — changed my mind in a hurry. I mean, Notre Dame completely outplayed the Spartans, who are probably a top-20 team. It didn't even look like an upset.

CA: It was the kind of game that I haven't really seen in a while. To go on the road and physically dominate a Big Ten team in a night game, to leave a top head coach like Mark Dantonio searching for answers and to leave no room for doubt, that is the kind of thing Notre Dame used to do. It was a very encouraging game for the whole fan base. But now the whole roster will look forward, and they'll see the player who has tormented them more than any other during the Brian Kelly era — Denard Robinson — coming to town with the Wolverines in a marquee night game. Can the Irish do it again?

AJ: Well, if there's one thing our time here has shown us, it's that this Michigan game is going to come down to the wire. This rivalry is too intense and these teams are too closely matched for this game to not be on the line in the fourth quarter. That's where I think this game will say a lot about the Kelly era. There have been some monumental collapses during the past two seasons: Michigan, Tulsa, Michigan ... You know how it goes. Purdue was a good sign, but can Notre Dame preserve a victory in a marquee matchup? If they can, this Irish team could be headed for something special. And yes, I know. We've said that before.

CA: Kelly touched on the Michigan State victory being a "signature win" in the postgame press conference. His use of the term is interesting, for his tenure at the helm for the Irish has seen a few signature wins — Utah and USC in 2010 come to mind — but has not produced a signature

stretch of wins. A victory over the Wolverines, whose recent victories over Notre Dame are almost cruel in their similarity, would be the "signature win" of the Kelly era without a close peer. If Kelly's team makes it happen, the program will likely have its first top-10 ranking in six years — and the success-starved Notre Dame fan base will really start dreaming big. But one thing is for certain: Crazy things will happen under the lights.

AJ: Okay, it's really late, and I might not be thinking straight. But bear with me for a second. Imagine the Irish beat Michigan this weekend. Where's the ceiling on this team? On the flip side, is yet another loss to the Wolverines a sign that Kelly might not be able to win the big game?

CA: It may just be one game, Allan, but it's a primetime test in front of a national audience, against arguably the program's biggest rival in recent seasons. This game will be a litmus test for the progress Kelly has made and the program he has built. He was brought here to win these games, the games Charlie Weis couldn't. He was brought here to build a program with speed at the skill positions and strength on the lines. It's year three of his tenure, and he has his speedy stars and his strong lines. Kelly led Cincinnati to a 12-0 campaign in his third year at the helm there, and though this may just be one game, a big win in primetime will have Irish fans dreaming of similar outcomes.

AJ: And that's where we need to pump the brakes. This team is not going undefeated. If they did, Alabama would pound the Irish back into the Stone Age (or worse, the Davie Era) in the national championship game. The ceiling is high, and the future is bright. But to expect a title game berth is simply foolish. Yes, there's a decent chance a win this week puts the Irish in a position to go 10-2. They might be a top-10 team, but they're not a top-five one. There's still a year or two to go before Notre Dame is truly back.

CA: Definitely not. But a senior class that has seen three last-minute defeats at the hands of the maize and blue will probably settle for sending Denard back to Ann Arbor empty-handed. And that's where the focus should be: on this game, this chance to beat Michigan.

AJ: Well, for the sake of the dreams of Irish fans everywhere, let's hope so. The longer the Irish stay undefeated, the wilder those dreams will get. They might just be dreams, but isn't it about time Notre Dame fans can dream big again?

Contact Allan Joseph at ajoseph2@nd.edu and Chris Allen at callen10@nd.edu. The views in this column are those of the authors and not necessarily those of The Observer.

RECRUITING

Night game attracts top corners, running backs

By **CHRIS ALLEN**
Sports Editor

The much-anticipated Saturday night matchup between No. 11 Notre Dame and No. 18 Michigan will attract more than students, fans and national media attention — it will attract dozens of football recruits from around the country to take in the action.

A total of 13 Notre Dame commitments and 18 other recruits from the 2013 and 2014 classes have been confirmed to be visiting campus this weekend and taking in the second night game at Notre Dame Stadium in as many seasons. Irish recruiting analyst Mike Frank said the growing tradition of night games at Notre Dame is an enormous draw for high school talent.

"Recruits love the night game. The atmosphere is just more exciting," said Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliated Irish Sports Daily. "The lights are on, the fans are a bit more rowdy, and that all impacts the game. It's also just anticipation, you have to sit around and wait all day for this big rivalry game. Every college coach wants to get the recruits into an environment

like that."

The focus in recruiting this weekend will be on a group of seven players who have been offered scholarships by Notre Dame but have not yet committed to the program. Among the seven are a duo of cornerbacks, Cole Luke and L.J. Moore, who can add depth at a position the Irish recruiting staff is looking to improve. Luke is the fourth-ranked player in Arizona according to ESPN.

"I think [Luke and Moore] are both really good prospects. I think [cornerback] is certainly a position where Notre Dame is in need of some players," Frank said. "They have two commitments right now in [2013 commitments] Rashad Kinlaw and Devin Butler, but it's really important they land at least one more corner. Luke is one of the top corners in the country, when you look at rankings. He's a guy who can run with just about anybody and likes to hit people."

Another position under the microscope is the running back position. The Irish will graduate running backs Theo Riddick and Cierre Wood this year and the coaching staff needs to build back depth

at the position. Irish commitment Jamel James and Pittsburgh commitment Corey Clement will both be visiting campus this weekend, and the Irish have some selling to do to both players, Frank said.

"Clement has always made it known that even though he committed early, he still wanted to explore options at some other schools," he said. "I think he likes Pittsburgh a great deal, but I think he sees opportunity at Notre Dame, too. I wouldn't say he's wavering, but he's making sure Pitt is really where he wants to go."

"Even though he's a commit, Jamel James has never been to Notre Dame before this weekend. You just don't know until he visits whether he's actually going to like it. This weekend is a big weekend to find out if it's a match made in heaven."

For more on Notre Dame recruiting, check out Mike Frank's irishsportsdaily.com. Email Mike at mikefrank18@sbcbglobal.net and tell him The Observer sent you.

Contact Chris Allen at callen10@nd.edu

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'RBU: RUNNING BACK UNIVERSITY'

Trio of Irish backs shares bond on and off the field

By **ANDREW OWENS**
Assistant Managing Editor

Notre Dame's three top running backs do everything together. They practice together, play together and hang out together.

But when all three are in the same room, it's obvious what their greatest pleasure is: arguing together.

"I call [sophomore George Atkinson] 'Stallion' because he runs and gallops like a horse," senior Cierre Wood said.

"Or because he looks like a horse," senior Theo Riddick said with a laugh.

The trio forms Notre Dame's set of rollicking rushers. They lightheartedly argue about each other's nicknames, which player is the best-looking ("It's obviously me," Atkinson said) and which of the three is most talented at video games ("I'm the best on the team," Riddick said).

When you dig past the blithe personas, there's one thing they all agree on: the group's talent, even if they can't agree on a name.

"RBU: Running Back University," Wood said.

"Three-headed monsters," Riddick said.

Keeping each other fresh

During last week's 20-3 win at Michigan State, Riddick, Wood and Atkinson carried the ball 12, 10 and five times, respectively, for 138 yards. Riddick said splitting the carries helped the trio late in the game.

"Oh yeah," Riddick said. "You're taking less hits. You get to catch a breather, so you'll feel fresher overall, physically and mentally."

"I think we all want to be [the main running back], but it's what's best for this team. Obviously what the coaches have been doing has been successful."

Atkinson said their success is fueled by each other's play.

"Definitely," he said. "It takes some pressure off each other and we feed off each other too. Someone might make the big run, so then the next guy wants to make the big run."

At times, the format can be a double-edged sword, Wood said.

"The way we come in and out, it's kind of hard to get a rhythm, but [Irish coach Brian Kelly] always says you have to stay the course and keep pushing, and that's what I did and they called me [at Michigan State] and I got the job done."

Serving in many roles

Kelly has taken advantage of the players' versatility by creating a hybrid role this season in which the running backs can also contribute as a receiver.

Riddick, who played receiver his sophomore and junior seasons after debuting at running back, said his ability to play different positions has aided his performance in 2012.

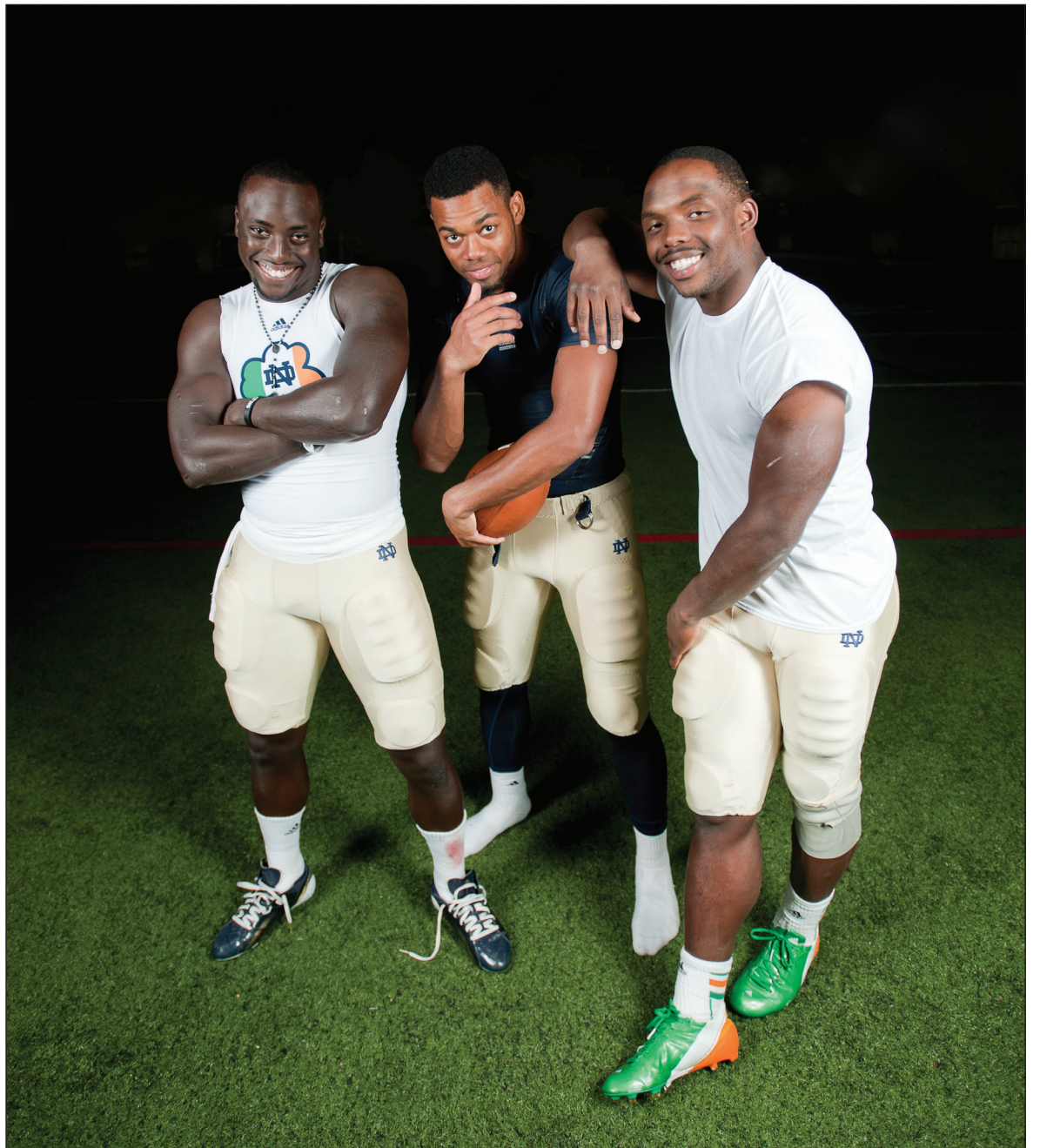
"My whole life I was only a running back. I had good hands and went out for a few passes here and there, but mainly I was a running back," he said. "My versatility really came in at the collegiate level and enhanced my game."

"I feel comfortable everywhere. I played wide receiver for two years and now I'm in the backfield."

Atkinson dabbled at both running back and receiver in high school and said he is benefiting from his background at both positions while still fine-tuning his play out wide.

"It's helped tremendously," he said. "The coaches back home prepared me well to play both positions. Coming [to Notre Dame], I didn't know what I was going to play, so I prepared for both positions that summer and I'm still developing at receiver and running plays and catching the ball."

In 2011, Atkinson starred as



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Seniors Theo Riddick and Cierre Wood have shared the load at running back with sophomore George Atkinson this season. Wood returned from suspension in the 20-3 road win over Michigan State on Sept. 15.

the Irish kick returner and impressed with his blazing speed while reaching the end zone twice, an experience he considers vital to his 2012 success.

"It helped a lot to find out how fast the game goes and I believe special teams is faster than the regular snap on the field because guys are running full speed at you," he said. "You have to make quick reads, so it helped a lot to get on the field and get experience and hearing the crowd and getting used to everything else. Coming in the next year, I knew what to expect."

This season, Riddick has not only shown off his speed and athleticism, but also his strength. In the Sept. 1 season-opening 50-10 win over Navy, Riddick rushed for some first downs on short-yardage plays; against Michigan State, he even contributed as a lead-blocker for Wood on a few carries.

"He's always been a hard-nosed type of runner and blocker," Atkinson said. "I wasn't surprised he's doing those kinds of things and I'm learning from him so when I'm thrown in there and I can block them and the same with Cierre."

Kelly said the different offensive looks have been

advantageous for the Irish during the team's first 3-0 start in 10 years.

"It's a tough matchup group," he said. "When you think of some of the formation groupings ... It creates some issues. And you know, we'll continue to utilize those multiple groupings. They work well for us."

"[We have] versatility ... We have to get George some more touches, because we think we have got really three backs that have equal starting ability. They can be stars and starters. We have to make sure we integrate them all into the offense."

Next man in

During Wood's two-game suspension for a violation of team rules, Riddick and Atkinson carried the load. Wood's return gives Kelly and offensive coordinator Chuck Martin the ability to let Wood adjust to game speed without rushing him.

"I think the implications are more about being fresh in the fourth quarter," he said. "He had fresh legs. He had not played in a couple weeks. He didn't have a lot of carries leading up to the later carries that he got [against Michigan State]."

"He played like a guy who had

a couple weeks off, and I think that depth at running back is going to allow us to keep turning those guys in and have four quarters of physical play at the running back position."

Atkinson rushed for 99 yards on nine carries and scampered into the end zone twice in the season-opening romp against Navy in Dublin, but don't expect his teammates to be amazed by his 2012 breakthrough.

"I wasn't surprised," Wood said. "I see him every day, I run with him every day. I practice with him every day. It was just a matter of time before those plays exposed him."

Wood was proud to see Atkinson emerge, but congratulatory text messages weren't the only ones he sent his fellow running backs.

"I was laughing at [Riddick] because I know there were a couple times he got hit and it hurt," Wood said. "I texted him and I said, 'I know that hurt,' and stuff like that. After [the game] he said, 'Yeah, man, it did. They hit pretty hard.'"

For this trio, everything's a laughing matter.

Contact Andrew Owens at aowens2@nd.edu



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

The three top Irish running backs have accounted for 388 yards rushing and four touchdowns through Notre Dame's first three games.



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer



SARAH O'CONNOR | The Observer

WOLVERINES PASSING

It's Denard. That's probably all that needs to be said. Senior quarterback Denard Robinson has recorded 944 total yards and eight touchdowns against the Irish the last two years. Last week, Robinson threw for 291 yards and three touchdowns in a 63-13 win over former Irish offensive coordinator Charley Molnar's Massachusetts. It is pretty clear who Robinson's favorite target is, as junior receiver Devin Gardner has scored a touchdown in every game this season and leads the Wolverines in receiving yards with 155. Gardner leads a receiving corps that averages 17 yards per catch.

In last season's 35-31 victory over Notre Dame, Robinson threw for 338 yards and four touchdowns, which overshadowed his three interceptions. Robinson led the Wolverines in an improbable double-digit comeback mostly through the air, picking apart an experienced Irish secondary.

With the loss of senior safety Jamaris Slaughter for the year, Notre Dame will start only one returning starter in its secondary: senior safety Zeke Motta. Last week, the young secondary looked impressive in holding Michigan State to 187 yards on 23-for-45 passing. The Irish defense also ranks seventh in the nation with 11 sacks, led by sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt's five. Against this stingy defense, opponents are averaging 10 points per game. But based on what Robinson has done to the Irish secondary in the past, Michigan comes in with the definite advantage until proven otherwise.

EDGE: MICHIGAN

WOLVERINES RUSHING

It is not too much of a surprise as to who is leading the rushing category for the Wolverines. Robinson has four rushing touchdowns to go with his 351 rushing yards, good for 8.8 yards per carry. The next highest total for Michigan? Senior running back Fitzgerald Touissant's 92 rushing yards.

The Irish defense has held strong against the run this season, only giving up 96.3 rushing yards per game. After putting a stop to Navy's triple option in

the 50-10 season-opening win on Sept. 1 in Dublin, the Irish defense shut down Heisman contender and Michigan State junior running back Le'Veon Bell. Bell rushed for only 77 yards in Notre Dame's 20-3 win Saturday, almost half of his season average of 140 yards per game.

But Robinson provides a much different rushing threat than Bell. All one has to do is look back at last year's meeting, where Robinson quietly rushed for 108 yards and a touchdown. If that weren't enough, Robinson rushed for 258 yards and two touchdowns in his last trip to Notre Dame. Robinson set the record for the longest run in Notre Dame Stadium history, with a weaving 87-yard touchdown run in the second quarter of the Wolverines' 21-7 win Sept. 11, 2010.

EDGE: EVEN

WOLVERINES OFFENSIVE COACHING

Last week, the Wolverines displayed great distribution as eight different Michigan players scored a touchdown. But this is Irish defensive coordinator Bob Diaco's third shot at cracking the Denard offense, and he showed last week that he can prepare his defense for the best of the best.

EDGE: EVEN

WOLVERINES SPECIAL TEAMS

Michigan has yet to put up any glowing stats in the return category, but its kicking game has been superb. Senior kicker Brandon Gibbons has only kicked one field goal, but junior punter Will Hagerup averages a whopping 48.5 yards per punt.

EDGE: EVEN

SPARTANS SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	vs. Alabama	L 14-41
Sept. 8	Air Force	W 31-25
Sept. 15	Massachusetts	W 63-13
Sept. 22	@ Notre Dame	
Oct. 6	@ Purdue	
Oct. 13	Illinois	
Oct. 20	Michigan State	
Oct. 27	@ Nebraska	
Nov. 3	@ Minnesota	
Nov. 10	Northwestern	
Nov. 17	Iowa	
Nov. 24	@ Ohio State	

HEAD T

NO. 18 MICHIGAN



(5th) Roy Roundtree 21	WR	(Sr.) Taylor Lewan 77	LT
(Jr.) Devin Gardner 12		(Fr.) Erik Magnuson 78	
(Sr.) Fitzgerald Toussaint 28	RB	(5th) Ricky Barnum 52	LG
(So.) Thomas Rawls 38		(Jr.) Joey Burzynski 56	
(Sr.) Denard Robinson 16	QB	(5th) Elliot Mealer 57	C
(So.) Russell Bellomy 8		(So.) Jack Miller 60	
(Jr.) Stephen Hopkins 33	FB	(5th) Patrick Oameh 65	RG
(So.) Joe Kerridge 36		(Jr.) Joey Burzynski 56	
(Sr.) Michael Schofield 75	RT	(Sr.) Michael Schofield 75	RT
(Sr.) Erik Gunderson 69		(Sr.) Erik Gunderson 69	
(5th) Brandon Moore 87	TE	(5th) Brandon Moore 87	TE
(5th) Mike Kwiatkowski 81		(5th) Mike Kwiatkowski 81	
(Sr.) Jeremy Gallon 10	WR	(Sr.) Jeremy Gallon 10	WR
(Jr.) Drew Dileo 9		(Jr.) Drew Dileo 9	



(Jr.) Courtney Avery 5	CB	(Jr.) Courtney Avery 5	CB
(So.) Raymon Taylor 6		(So.) Raymon Taylor 6	
(So.) Desmond Morgan 44	OLB	(So.) Desmond Morgan 44	OLB
(Fr.) James Ross III 15		(Fr.) James Ross III 15	
(Sr.) Thomas Gordon 30	S	(Jr.) Jibreel Black 55	DE
(Fr.) Jarrod Wilson 22		(So.) Frank Clark 57	
(5th) Kenny Demens 25	MLB	(Sr.) Will Campbell 73	DT
(Fr.) Joe Bolden 35		(Sr.) Nathan Brink 67	
(Sr.) Jordan Kovacs 32	S	(Sr.) Quinton Washington 76	NT
(So.) Marvin Robinson 3		(Jr.) Richard Ash 54	
(Sr.) Craig Roh 88	DE	(Sr.) Craig Roh 88	DE
(Sr.) Nathan Brink 67		(Sr.) Nathan Brink 67	
(Jr.) Jake Ryan 47	OLB	(Jr.) Jake Ryan 47	OLB
(Sr.) Cam Gordon 4		(Sr.) Cam Gordon 4	
(5th) J.T. Floyd 8	CB	(5th) J.T. Floyd 8	CB
(So.) Raymon Taylor 6		(So.) Raymon Taylor 6	



(Sr.) Brandon Gibbons 34	PK	(So.) Matt Wile 45	KO
(So.) Matt Wile 45		(Sr.) Seth Broekhuizen 46	
(Jr.) Will Hagerup 43	P	(Fr.) Dennis Norfleet 26	KR
(So.) Matt Wile 45		(Sr.) Vincent Smith 2	
(Sr.) Jeremy Gallon 10	PR	(Sr.) Jareth Glanda 54	LS
(Fr.) Dennis Norfleet 26		(Sr.) Curt Graman 94	



Allan Joseph
Editor-in-Chief



Andrew Owens
Assistant Managing Editor



Chris Allen
Sports Editor

Oh, the Michigan game. It's the bane of this senior class's football existence. Look back on Manti Te'o's illustrious career, one of the best in Notre Dame history. Does it seem right that he's never beaten a team coached by Rich Rodriguez or Brady Hoke? These aren't exactly Bo Schembechlers on the sideline, after all. He'll be fired up and making plays all night long.

On the other side of the ball, the Irish can actually control the pace of the game with what should be an effective rushing attack, which means they can keep Denard Robinson off the field. Te'o and his front seven will keep Robinson in check, and Everett Golson will make a name for himself in a clutch victory. It'll be close, of course, but Te'o and his classmates will pull this one out in an electric atmosphere.

With strong defensive play (just 30 points surrendered in three games) and 11 fewer turnovers than last season at this time, Irish coach Brian Kelly's plan for the program is coming together.

But this week represents a new test for the Irish. For Notre Dame to truly enter the BCS discussion, it needs a win over Michigan first. In each of the past three seasons, the Irish have suffered last-minute losses to the Wolverines, the worst of which was last year's fourth-quarter collapse.

Denard Robinson will make some big plays, but the Irish front seven will contain him most of the time and, most importantly, late in the game when it matters most. This time, a Notre Dame score in the final minutes will devastate Michigan and propel the Irish to a 4-0 record.

Any member of the current senior class, be it a member of the football team or an interested observer in the stands, will have nightmares about Denard Robinson well after he or she graduates. He has his flaws as a passer, but his back-to-back game-winning drives the past two seasons have displayed a knack for the dramatic and swung this rivalry. Notre Dame has one chance to swing it back and enact a measure of revenge on Denard before he leaves town forever.

If recent history is any indication, it'll be close and high-scoring. Denard will get his chance to win the game again. I suspect this time the increasingly indescribable Te'o and the stout Notre Dame defense will make a stand, and deliver an iconic win under the lights.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 27, Michigan 24

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 30, Michigan 24

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 34, Michigan 30

0 HEAD



NO. 11 NOTRE DAME

CB 6 KeiVarae Russell (Fr.)

43 Josh Atkinson (So.)

OLB 13 Danny Spond (Jr.)

30 Ben Councell (So.)

DE 89 Kapron Lewis-Moore (Gr.)

91 Sheldon Day (Fr.)

NG 9 Louis Nix (Jr.)

96 Kona Schwenke (Jr.)

DE 7 Stephon Tuitt (So.)

50 Chase Hounshell (So.)

OLB 55 Prince Shembo (Jr.)

11 Ishaq Williams (So.)

CB 2 Bennett Jackson (Jr.)

21 Jalen Brown (So.)

WR 7 T.J. Jones (Jr.)

10 DaVaris Daniels (So.)

WR 9 Robby Toma (Sr.)

19 Davonte' Neal (Fr.)

RT 74 Christian Lombard (Jr.)

72 Nick Martin (So.)

RG 57 Mike Golic Jr. (Gr.)

65 Conor Hanratty (So.)

C 52 Braxton Cave (Gr.)

57 Mike Golic Jr. (Gr.)

LG 66 Chris Watt (Sr.)

65 Conor Hanratty (So.)

LT 70 Zack Martin (Sr.)

78 Ronnie Stanley (Fr.)

TE 80 Tyler Eifert (Sr.)

18 Beh Koyack (So.)

WR 81 John Goodman (Gr.)

87 Daniel Smith (Jr.)

KO 27 Kyle Brindza (So.)

40 Nick Tausch (Sr.)

KR 4 George Atkinson (So.)

6 Theo Riddick (Sr.)

LS 60 Jordan Cowart (Sr.)

61 Scott Daly (Fr.)

PK 27 Kyle Brindza (So.)

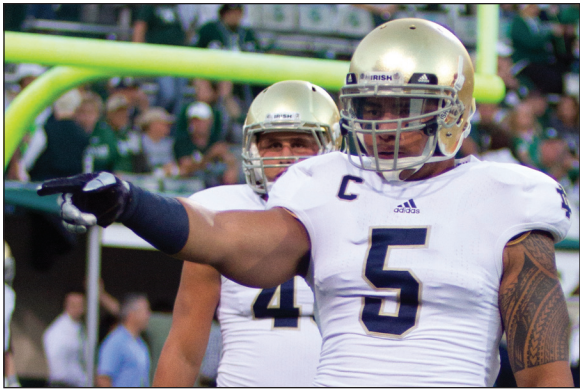
40 Nick Tausch (Sr.)

P 35 Ben Turk (Sr.)

27 Kyle Brindza (So.)

PR 19 Davonte' Neal (Fr.)

81 John Goodman (Gr.)



KEVIN SONG | The Observer



KIRBY MCKENNA | The Observer

IRISH PASSING

Notre Dame hasn't needed sophomore quarterback Everett Golson to step up yet, but the first-time starter has done enough to keep the Irish competitive offensively. Golson has thrown for 611 yards and three touchdowns this season, while only throwing one interception in the season opener. Last week, Golson threw for 178 yards and a touchdown, but efficiently managed the game while not allowing the Spartans back into the game with a bad decision or miscue. Meanwhile, eight different Irish receivers have caught a reception of at 20 yards or more and Golson's scrambling ability is surely one of the reasons why. Notre Dame's stable of veteran wide receivers have flown under the radar, but have come up big in recent weeks. Last week, senior receiver Robby Toma had five catches for 58 yards, while graduate student receiver John Goodman pulled in a spectacular one-handed touchdown catch to start the scoring for the Irish.

Michigan comes into the game with senior safeties Jordan Kovacs and Thomas Gordon leading the team in tackles. Even though the defense has yet to record an interception, the Wolverines only give up 157.7 passing yards per game. The defense hasn't really pressured the quarterback too much with only three sacks and the defensive line is still trying to replace three graduated starters from last season. But the secondary returns three starters and figures to be a solid defense against an offense that hasn't been asked to do too much so far this season.

EDGE: EVEN

IRISH RUSHING

Once again, the Irish running game came up big when it needed to in the fourth quarter of the win over Michigan State. After returning from his two-game suspension, senior running back Cierre Wood 56 yards on 10 carries and will become a bigger part of the rushing game in his first home game this season. Since returning from receiver to running back, senior Theo Riddick leads the Irish in rushing with

190 rushing yards and two touchdowns — the bulk of that coming against Navy. Sophomore running back George Atkinson rounds out the rushing attack with 142 rushing yards, nearly averaging a first down per carry and showing his big-run potential with an average of 9.5 yards per carry. Notre Dame averages 155.7 rushing yards per game and are going up against a Michgian defense that gives up 192.3 rushing yards per game and 5.6 yards per carry. Expect the offense to run the ball often against the Wolverine defense.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

It will be a true battle of wits Saturday as Michigan coach Brady Hoke and defensive coordinator Greg Mattison will undoubtedly come prepared to face Irish coach Brian Kelly's versatile attack. May the best coach win.

EDGE: EVEN

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

Sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza has stepped up following senior Nick Tausch's injury, going 2-for-2 last week against Michigan State and nailing the game-winner in the 20-17 win over Purdue on Sept. 8 in the home opener. Atkinson always remains a threat on kickoff return after his two touchdown returns last season. Senior punter Ben Turk is averaging a solid 41.5 yards per punt and came up huge last week in consistently pinning Michigan State deep in its own territory with eight punts.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH SCHEDULE

Sept. 1	vs. Navy	W 50-10
Sept. 8	Purdue	W 20-17
Sept. 15	@ Michigan St.	W 20-3
Sept. 22	Michigan	
Oct. 6	vs. Miami	
Oct. 13	Stanford	
Oct. 20	BYU	
Oct. 27	@ Oklahoma	
Nov. 3	Pittsburgh	
Nov. 10	@ Boston College	
Nov. 17	Wake Forest	
Nov. 24	@ USC	



Andrew Gastelum
Associate Sports Editor

Expectations are sky high. And recently when that happens, the Irish lose and drop from their unusually high ranking.

But this Irish team showed me something different last week that goes far beyond making tackles and scoring points. The pass defense is young, the offense often sputters and yet Notre Dame still finds some way to pull out a victory when everything looks to be in its way.

There is really no stopping Denard. But the only way to make sure he doesn't kill Notre Dame's dreams for the third straight year is to keep the ball away from him for as long as possible. I believe the Irish rushing attack will do just that, and have a huge game to push the Irish to 4-0 in a hectic September and avoid yet another heartbreak.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 31, Michigan 21



Matthew DeFranks
Associate Sports Editor

With a win against the rival Wolverines, Notre Dame will crack the top 10 for the first time since 2006, when Charlie Weis was the future of Notre Dame football. Now, it's Brian Kelly's shot.

Last week against Michigan State, Kelly and the Irish rolled out a dominating defense and an efficient offense in grinding out a physical win over the then-No. 10 Spartans. And the same game plan should work against a Michigan team that has given Notre Dame fits over the past three years.

For the seniors, it will be their last — and best — shot at taking down Denard Robinson. The running game will continue to improve as Cierre Wood gets reacclimated and the defense will be its usual self.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 26, Michigan 13

18/17

11/15

Michigan at Notre Dame

(2-1) (3-0)

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True freshmen Day, Russell boost defense

By **MATTHEW DeFRANKS**
Associate Sports Editor

In just two plays, freshman defensive end Sheldon Day made himself known — even if one did end in him stomping up and down in frustration.

On back-to-back plays during No. 11 Notre Dame's 20-3 win at Michigan State, Day recorded a sack and a near-interception that will go down as just a pass breakup. Day, in frustration, began jumping up and down before ultimately causing a bone spur. He will, however, play Saturday against No. 18 Michigan.

Day is just one, along with cornerback KeiVarae Russell and safeties Elijah Shumate and Nicky Baratti, of four true freshmen contributing to the Irish defense.

"We are much more committed to getting all those players valuable time because of the length and the depth of the schedule that we play and we know we are going to need them at some time during the year," Irish coach Brian Kelly said.

Kelly, typically known for his high-flying and fast-paced offense, has looked to his defense to turn around the Notre Dame program.

"Well, I think I said it in my opening press conference when I took the job here, was that it was important that if we wanted to compete nationally, we had to have a defense that could control the different teams that we play on a week to week basis," Kelly said. "So getting our defense up to that level through recruiting, through player development, through scheme, has been job one. It's getting better and better each and every year."

Notre Dame (3-0) has allowed just 30 points through its first three games, the fewest in nearly 25 years. The freshmen have provided not only depth but also production, totaling 19 tackles, five pass breakups and 1.5 sacks.

"[They need to] keep doing what they're doing," graduate student defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore said. "They're working hard in practice every day and we're kind of learning from each other and we have a good positive attitude with each other. I think that's a big help as well."

Day enrolled early this spring and forced his way into a deep rotation on the defensive line. The Irish consistently use six different players along the defensive front. Kelly said defensive line coach Mike Elston has done a great job with the younger players.

"His focus is strictly on that defensive line room. He was a special teams coordinator as well last year," Kelly said. "And just getting him focused on that room, the

personalities that are within that room, and getting them all to understand they have a role requires a great relationship with the players."

Lewis-Moore said the senior leadership along the defensive line has helped Day and the defensive backs flourish in their first year.

"If we wanted to compete nationally, we had to have a defense that could control the different teams we play on a week to week basis."

Brian Kelly
Irish coach

"It's a big thing. You just have to keep on them. You can't let them get lost in the moment," Lewis-Moore said. "You have to be there for them whenever they need anything."

In the season-opening 50-10 win over Navy, Russell became the first freshman in program history to start the season at cornerback. Russell

earned the starting nod after junior cornerback Lo Wood injured his Achilles. Wood is out for the season.

Despite a shaky game against Navy, the converted running back and the rest of the secondary have yet to allow an opponent to throw for more than 200 yards.

Shumate, who will see more playing time after graduate student Jamoris Slaughter's season-ending Achilles injury, has added an instant spark to the Irish defense. Against Michigan State, he broke up two passes on third down that forced the Spartans to punt.

"I like Elijah. He's an aggressive player and he's got pretty good ability," senior safety Zeke Motta said. "He's really improving a lot. Getting him lined up and on the same page as everyone else is coming along."

Day, Russell, Shumate and Baratti will try to slow down the Wolverines and senior quarterback Denard Robinson on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. at Notre Dame Stadium.

Contact Matthew DeFranks
at mdefrank@nd.edu



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

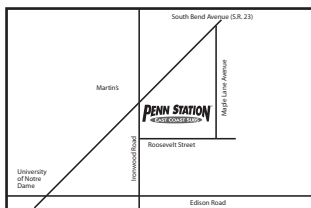
Freshman safety Elijah Shumate tackles a Navy ballcarrier on Sept. 1. Shumate has seen playing time in every Notre Dame game this season.

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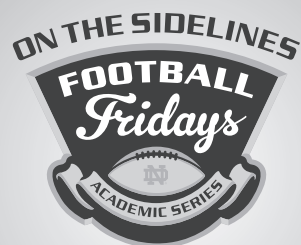
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Robinson faces Irish one last time



AP

Michigan senior quarterback Denard Robinson hands the ball off during the 2010 meeting between Michigan and Notre Dame.

By **ANDREW GASTELUM**
Associate Sports Editor

If Michigan senior quarterback Denard Robinson put together a resume against Notre Dame, it would look something like this: longest run in Notre Dame Stadium history, two straight comeback wins with under 30 seconds remaining, eight touchdowns and 944 total yards — all in just two games.

"He's a superior football player," Irish coach Brian Kelly said. "He's a difference maker."

Robinson made the first night game in the history of Michigan Stadium a night to forget for the Irish last season. The Deerfield Beach, Fla., native threw for 338 yards and four touchdowns while rushing for 108 yards and a touchdown in the Wolverines' 35-31 victory on Sept. 10, 2011. Two of those passing touchdowns came within the last two minutes of the game, including the game-winner on a 16-yard touchdown pass with two seconds left.

Behind Robinson, the Wolverines put up 28 points in the fourth quarter, which they entered facing a 24-7 deficit. With 23 seconds left in the game, Michigan was stuck at its own 20-yard line trailing by three before Robison's heroics took center stage.

"Well, I thought we did a pretty good job, really, for three quarters [last year]," Kelly said. "You know, I think if there's a couple plays we'd like to have back in the passing game maybe; but we liked our plan. [Now] we think that we are physically a better football team than we were the previous couple years."

It is Robinson's ability to make a big play down the field that Kelly said the Irish will focus on limiting.

"We have to find a way to limit big chunk plays, just like we have the first few weeks," Kelly said. "It's about our defense not giving up those big chunk plays. We gave them up in the running game in year one and we gave them up in the passing game in year two. We have to eliminate and control those big plays that are out there. If we do that, we feel pretty good."

In year one against Notre Dame, Robinson torched the Irish for 502 total yards and three touchdowns in a 28-24 win at Notre Dame Stadium on Sept. 11, 2010. A major chunk of his 258 rushing yards came on one carry, an 87-yard touchdown that set the record for the longest run in Notre Dame Stadium history. His other rushing touchdown came with 27 seconds left in the fourth quarter to send the Wolverines home with the victory. Despite Robinson's success against Notre Dame, Irish senior safety Zeke Motta said he does not change much when trying to prepare for a dynamic quarterback.

"There's not much that we do differently," Motta said. "I'm going to keep my preparation the same. I'm going to focus on my fundamentals."

Robinson does not come without his weaknesses, however. No. 1 Alabama's defense held Robinson to 27 rushing yards and 200 passing yards with two interceptions in the 41-14 Alabama win Sept. 1. The Crimson Tide (3-0) unveiled a possible formula for stopping Robinson, based on establishing an early lead and containing the quarterback within the pocket.

"I think it was attributed to getting up on them," Kelly said. "[Alabama] got some scores on them. [Michigan] got them behind the chains a few times. And then, you know, they had some opportunistic turnovers."

Kelly said the much-improved Irish defense cannot risk focusing too much on either Robinson's running or passing, or the man nicknamed "Shoelace" could come away undefeated against Notre Dame.

"It's a difficult proposition, because you can't sell out on either [rushing or passing]," Kelly said. "You have to be balanced. You have to be able to manage it and you've got to keep him from making big plays. So there isn't an easy answer to that. He's a superior football player. He's not a great player; he's the best player on the field."

Contact Andrew Gastelum at agastell1@nd.edu

Check out the "Waking the Echoes" series online at ndsmcobserver.com.

*This week's installment features **Bobby Taylor**.*

SATURDAY SCHOLAR SERIES

A different game plan for autumn weekends from the College of Arts and Letters

You are invited to join in discussion with some of Notre Dame's most engaging faculty in the Saturday Scholar Series on "home game" Saturdays. Each lecture and Q&A, sponsored by the College of Arts and Letters, is presented in the Snite Museum's Annenberg Auditorium at 12 noon, unless otherwise noted. No tickets required.

"Caesar's Legacy at Butrint: Archaeological Discoveries From Current Excavations in the Heart of the Ancient City"

David Hernandez

Assistant Professor and Director of the Butrint Archaeological Research Project
Department of Classics

4:00 p.m.

Saturday, September 22, 2012

Snite Museum's Annenberg Auditorium

Excavations at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Butrint in Albania have led to the discovery of the city's Roman forum, the monumental town square that was built nearly 2,000 years ago as the centerpiece of a Roman colony founded by Julius Caesar. The archaeological expedition has unearthed significant public buildings and a broad range of material evidence, from sculptures and inscriptions to animal bones and seeds, that help piece together the story of the city's complex urban development from the 5th century B.C. to modern times.



9.8.12 (vs. Purdue University)
"Gregori and Washington Hall"

Mark Pilkinton, Professor, Department of Film, Television, and Theatre

9.22.12 (vs. University of Michigan) 7:30 p.m. game; 4 p.m. lecture
"Caesar's Legacy at Butrint: Archaeological Discoveries From Current Excavations in the Heart of the Ancient City"

David Hernandez, Assistant Professor, Director of the Butrint Archaeological Research Project, Department of Classics

10.13.12 (vs. Stanford University)

"Presidential Campaign Commercials From 'I Like Ike' to Today"

Susan C. Ohmer, The William T. and Helen Kuhn Carey Associate Professor of Modern Communication, Department of Film, Television, and Theatre; Director of Digital ND

10.20.12 (vs. Brigham Young University)

"Sleep on It! There's More to It Than Just the Old Adage"

Jessica Payne, Assistant Professor, Nancy O'Neill Collegiate Chair in Psychology, Director of the Sleep, Stress and Memory Lab, Department of Psychology

11.3.12 (vs. University of Pittsburgh)

"The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society"

Brad S. Gregory, Professor, Department of History

11.17.12 (vs. Wake Forest University)

"What's So Funny About a Joke?"

Mark W. Roche, Rev. Edmund P. Joyce, C.S.C.
Professor of German Language and Literature, Department of German and Russian Languages and Literatures

To review the entire Saturday Scholars Series visit: saturdayscholar.nd.edu



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