

# IRISH INSIDER

NOTRE DAME 13, MICHIGAN 6 | **MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2012** | NDSMCOBSERVER.COM

## At long last

*Rees relieves Golson, defense leads Notre Dame over Michigan for first time since 2008*

By **CONOR KELLY**  
Sports Writer

On a cool night at Notre Dame Stadium, No. 11 Notre Dame's defense finally removed a massive weight from its collective shoulders by keeping Michigan senior quarterback Denard Robinson out of the end zone and causing six turnovers as the Irish defeated the No. 18 Wolverines 13-6.

The Irish defense proved to be dominant for the fourth straight week and the offense, led by junior quarterback Tommy Rees, put up just enough points to win and put the game away with two sustained drives in the fourth quarter. Rees replaced starting sophomore quarterback Everett Golson in the second quarter.

Despite Michigan's struggles moving the ball and with turnovers, the Irish did not put the game away until late in the fourth quarter. With Notre Dame (4-0) leading 13-3 and Michigan (2-2) driving, freshman defensive end Sheldon Day sacked Robinson with 3:36 remaining, forcing the Wolverines to a 31-yard field goal. The sack helped quell memories of losses to Michigan in 2009, 2010 and 2011.

From there, Rees and the Irish offense ran out the clock, converting two third downs in the process. Rees connected with senior tight end Tyler Eifert on a route down the right sideline for a 38-yard gain on third-and-four and senior tailback Theo Riddick busted through the line for an 8-yard run on third-and-eight that iced the game for the Irish.

"You've got to run into what you've got," Riddick said. "They stacked the box. I was basically, 'boxed in' is the term we use. You've just got to put your foot in the ground."

After the game, Irish coach Brian Kelly had to deny the possibility of a brewing quarterback controversy for the second time in three weeks after he yanked Golson for Rees. The sophomore completed just three of eight passes for 30 yards to start the game. He was intercepted twice, once on his first attempt of the day and again on his last as he scrambled to his right and lobbed an underthrown ball in the direction of sophomore receiver DaVaris Daniels that Michigan safety Thomas Gordon picked off in the end zone.

"Everett is our starter," Kelly said after the game. "He was not as comfortable as I would have liked after playing the Michigan



ALEX PARTAK | The Observer

**Senior tight end Tyler Eifert hauls in a 38-yard pass on Notre Dame's final drive during its 13-6 win over Michigan on Saturday. The catch was Eifert's only of the game and helped the Irish run out the clock.**

State game where he was in an incredible environment. He needs to just settle down a little bit, and he's going to be fine. He'll have a week off to evaluate all the things."

Rees continued to play the role of closer and experienced backup for the Irish, managing the offense efficiently on eight of 11 passing with no completion bigger than his toss third-down toss to Eifert on Notre Dame's final drive of the game. Rees also scored the team's lone touchdown of the day, a 2-yard designed right out of an empty set formation at 4:13 of the second quarter. It was the first rushing touchdown of his career.

"We're fairly comfortable if we need Tommy to come in and handle some of the offense for us, if we feel like it's necessary, we will," Kelly said. "He's a great asset to have if you need him. To close out a game, we'll continue to go that route. We'd like to continue to develop Everett so that

we don't have to do that, but we're still going to try to win football games anyway possible."

Despite the seeming ambiguity of his role, Rees said he is comfortable with helping out Golson and coming in whenever he is needed.

"You just have to be prepared throughout the week," Rees said. "You have to do the little things throughout the week and prepare like you're going to play and stay ready and engaged while the game is going on."

Though the quarterback situation garnered a lot of attention, the Irish defense picked off five Michigan passes, caused a fumble and limited the Wolverines to just 299 yards of total offense.

While Notre Dame's defensive front has been much lauded early this season, the young Irish defensive backfield came up huge under the brightest lights, accounting for three interceptions and limiting the big play ability of Robinson and the Wolverines.

Senior safety Zeke Motta stepped into the role of elder statesmen in the Irish secondary and directed a unit that helped pick off Michigan on five consecutive pass attempts in the first half. Freshman safety Nicky Baratti stepped in front of a half-back pass in the end zone in the first quarter while junior cornerback Bennett Jackson and freshman cornerback KeiVarae Russell both picked off Robinson in the

second.

"The young defensive backs showed they had the capability to rise up in games like this. Bennett obviously had a hell of a game. Everybody played great," Motta said. "It was just the beastliness of the defense imposing its will on Denard and his mentality."

Senior captain and linebacker Manti Te'o had a career performance on a night that Notre Dame fans honored the Hawaii native by wearing a leis a just over a week after Te'o lost his girlfriend and grandmother within 24 hours. The senior recorded eight tackles and two interceptions. Te'o is now tied with Jackson for the team lead in interceptions with three.

"[Manti] is the guy in there," Kelly said. "I mean, it all evolves around him, his personality, his strength. He's a special guy. Take advantage of him while you've got him now, because I've never been around a kid like that."

Te'o keyed an Irish front seven that limited the explosive Robinson to 90 rushing yards on 26 carries and got pressure on him all night, a vast improvement over a year ago when Robinson torched the Irish for 446 yards in Michigan's 34-30 victory over Notre Dame in Ann Arbor. Junior linebacker Danny Spond had seven tackles, and sophomore defensive tackle Stephon Tuitt continued to terrorize opposing quarterbacks, recording a sack of Robinson in the first quarter that brought his season total to six.

In his continued starting role following the injury of senior Nick Tausch, sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza was perfect for the Irish, knocking home field goals of 33 and 39 yards.

The Irish now move into their bye week at 4-0 for the first time since 2002 and will face Miami at Soldier Field in Chicago on Oct. 6.

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## PLAYER OF THE GAME

**MANTI TE'O**  
NOTRE DAME LINEBACKER

On a night that tens of thousands fans wore leis in support of the senior linebacker, Te'o responded by recording eight tackles and two interceptions in assisting the Irish hold Denard Robinson and Michigan to 299 yards of total offense. Te'o also forced another interception when he hurried Robinson into an errant pass.

# REPORT CARD

C

## QUARTERBACKS

There was not much that went right for Everett Golson, whose two interceptions forced the insertion of Tommy Rees. Rees led the Irish offense for two-thirds of the game and did not wow anyone but did not turn the ball over either.

B-

## RUNNING BACKS

Cierre Wood ran hard when he got the ball, averaging 5.6 yards per carry, but the Irish struggled to find consistency on the ground. Notre Dame managed just three yards per carry and the lone rushing touchdown came from Rees.

B-

## RECEIVERS

The receivers were not aided by the quarterback struggles but also did not do much to assist the signal callers. Tyler Eifert managed just one catch and the receivers failed to get open on third down. It was encouraging, however, to see DaVaris Daniels come back from injury nicely.

B

## OFFENSIVE LINE

The unit played well for the second consecutive week, despite not putting up eye-popping numbers in the run game. The offensive line did not allow a Wolverine sack and conceded just two tackles for loss and one quarterback hurry.

A-

## DEFENSIVE LINE

The deep and talented unit showed up once again, dropping Denard Robinson at key junctures of the game. Stephon Tuitt's sack in the first quarter forced a missed field goal while Sheldon Day's stopped a threatening Wolverine drive in the fourth quarter.

A

## LINEBACKERS

Manti Te'o played like the All-American he is and the Heisman Trophy candidate he could be. After three seasons without an interception, he has three through four games. Danny Spond and Prince Shembo also played key roles in containing the slippery Robinson.

A

## DEFENSIVE BACKS

For the fourth time this season, the Irish held their opponent under 200 yards passing. What was once a glaring weakness has improved dramatically over the last two weeks. The secondary had three of the five interceptions.

B

## SPECIAL TEAMS

Kyle Brindza nailed both of his field goals, including a 39-yarder in the fourth quarter that extended Notre Dame's lead to 10. Ben Turk had a couple bad punts and the Irish failed to register a single return yard.

A

## COACHING

What a difference a year makes. Last year, Robinson tortured the Irish, but Bob Diaco was ready this time and held the Wolverines out of the end zone.

## OVERALL GPA: 3.22

Notre Dame rode its stellar, opportunistic defense Saturday, but the offense has a lot of work to do to get up to its counterpart's level. Everett Golson remains the starter for Notre Dame's next game against Miami, but Tommy Rees still looms as a servicable backup. As long as the defense plays like the last two game, it may not matter.

# PLAY OF THE GAME

## REES ICES THE GAME WITH THIRD-DOWN COMPLETION TO EIFERT

On the game's final drive, when a first down could have ended the game, Tommy Rees found Tyler Eifert down the sideline for a 38-yard gain on third-and-four. The reception was Eifert's first in the last two games and allowed the Irish to run out the clock.



KIRBY MCKENNA | The Observer

*Graduate student defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore and junior linebacker Prince Shembo celebrate Notre Dame's 13-6 win over Michigan. The win was the first over the Wolverines since 2008.*

# Notre Dame overcomes Michigan — finally



**Matthew DeFranks**  
Associate Sports Editor

The ghosts are gone. The demons have been exorcised. The curse has been lifted. Finally.

Michigan's winged helmets could not help Denard Robinson fly. His shoelaces and his wobbly throws tripped him up. And this time, it was Notre Dame that closed the game. Finally.

Notre Dame did something Saturday it had not done since 2008 — beat the Wolverines. Theo Riddick said the 0-3 record against Michigan was "tatted" on the seniors. Now, that blemish is gone along with nightmares of fourth-quarter comebacks and nail-biting, back-breaking losses.

First, it was Tate Forcier's zinger to Greg Matthews that buried Jimmy Clausen, Charlie Weis and Notre Dame in 2009. Then, it was Robinson running around, over and through the Irish in 2010. And then last season, well, we all know what happened.

But those memories should disappear as easily as Notre Dame's fourth quarter lead did in 2011. All those

memories are as distant as Robinson's passes to his own team.

The way Notre Dame won was not like the Irish of the last three years. It was not even like the Wolverines of the past three seasons. This game wasn't a typical Notre Dame-Michigan game. There was no scoring in the 30s (heck, the teams combined 19 points). There was no late heroics, no late daggers, no real drama. But for this Irish squad, that's fine with them.

This win had the 2012 team's fingerprints all over it. Notre Dame used its dominating defense instead of an electrifying offense and the Irish manhandled and frustrated Robinson much in the same way he had them in the last two years.

He was sacked three times, threw four interceptions and fumbled once in a game that could have been quite the 22nd birthday celebration. Instead, it was the Irish who put the icing on their victory cake by limiting the Michigan offense to less than 300 yards.

Notre Dame will be winning ugly — the 20-3 win over Michigan State and the 13-6 victory over Michigan are not going to be many highlight

reels — but that is just who this team is. The win marked Notre Dame's lowest output in a victory since they beat USC 10-6 in 1990.

Its identity will become increasingly defensive, especially if Brian Kelly's offense continues to sputter and Manti Te'o keeps making a case for the Heisman Trophy.

Not that it's a bad thing.

Notre Dame turned a corner in the win over the Wolverines. It showed it can handle the pressure of back-to-back top-20 opponents, that it can manage the atmosphere surrounding a night game in Notre Dame Stadium, that it can beat rivals who tormented it.

This team is different than ones in the past. And because it is, they are 4-0 for the first time in 10 years. The Irish took consecutive games over top-25 opponents for the first time in seven years. Notre Dame is in the top 10 for the first time in six years. They are a BCS contender.

Finally.

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

# Defense handles Michigan, forces turnovers



Senior linebacker Manti Te'o, 5, on ground, reacts after intercepting his second pass during Notre Dame's 13-6 win over Michigan. Te'o also added eight tackles and a quarterback hurry.

By **JOSEPH MONARDO**  
Sports Writer

Against a team that has found about every possible way to beat Notre Dame over the past three years, one with a dynamic threat on offense, the No. 11 Irish put forth a stellar defensive performance to capture a 13-6 win Saturday.

The same Michigan and the same Denard Robinson that have run, passed and done whatever else they wanted to against the Irish in recent history were left without an answer.

Notre Dame (4-0) held No. 18 Michigan to 299 yards and forced the Wolverines (2-2) into six turnovers, while keeping them out of the end zone for the first time in the rivalry matchup since 1943.

"Defensively, what can I say, six turnovers, limited what we felt is one of the most dynamic offensive players in the country to no touchdowns," Irish coach Brian Kelly said. "[It was] just an incredible performance by our defense."

On a night when the Irish offense struggled to move the ball consistently and put points on the board, Notre Dame's defense harassed Robinson, made plays on the back end and brought down more interceptions in the first half than during any full game since 1988. Never was Notre Dame's control over Michigan's aerial assault more noticeable than when the Irish intercepted five straight pass attempts in a span stretching from the final minute of the first quarter to the final play of the first half.

Freshman safety Nicky Baratti

picked off Michigan senior running back Vincent Smith in the Notre Dame end zone with 51 seconds left in the first quarter to begin the stretch. Two interceptions by Irish senior linebacker Manti Te'o and one each from junior cornerback Bennett Jackson and freshman cornerback KeiVarae Russell continued the defensive assault.

Notre Dame's ability to turn the Wolverines over was the result of a game plan different from those employed in previous matchups with Michigan, Kelly said.

"We got into a lot more zone [coverage], which we knew if we got into more zone we could be more susceptible to some of the runs [by Robinson], but we handled ourselves very well," he said.

Jackson also pounced on a Robinson fumble early in the second half for Notre Dame's sixth and final takeaway. For Notre Dame's secondary, the red-letter day established the back end's ability to keep up with Notre Dame's much-hyped front seven.

"I think we wanted to make certain that we were going to be able to support our front seven in the back end of the defense, and I think after tonight, we all feel that we've got some young guys back there that can play at a high level," Kelly said.

Sophomore safety Matthias Farley was forced into the starting role against Michigan after a season-ending injury to graduate student safety Jamoris Slaughter. The first-time starter was just one of the highlights in Notre Dame's secondary, as Jackson added nine tackles to his interception and

fumble recovery. Senior safety Zeke Motta recorded six tackles and a pass breakup in the win.

After keeping Michigan State and Michigan out of the end zone in consecutive weeks, the Irish defense is off to one of the best starts in program history. The 36 points allowed through four games are the fewest allowed by Notre Dame during such a stretch since 1975. Before Saturday, Notre Dame had not allowed six points or less to a top-20 opponent since 1943.

"Look, when you limit Michigan and Michigan State to no touchdowns, the significance is it's not just about one player," Kelly said. "It's 11 players brought into a scheme. ... I mean, that's a great feeling to have when you know your defense is playing at that level."

But the early performances represent substantial steps of progress, not the ultimate achievement, Jackson said.



"We are trying to be the best defense in the nation and we are going to keep working at that," he said.

Te'o, the emotional leader of the defense, said the unit's high standards means the ceiling is the limit.

"I think, for us, we are trying to not let [the offense] get any points," he said. "I think, you know, when your defense is disappointed that they kicked a field goal and made it, that's when you know, like, 'Dang, we are going to be good.'"

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## SCORING SUMMARY

	1 <sup>ST</sup>	2 <sup>ND</sup>	3 <sup>RD</sup>	4 <sup>TH</sup>	TOTAL
 	0	0	0	6	6
	0	10	0	3	13

### 1 NO SCORING DRIVES

### 2 NOTRE DAME 3, MICHIGAN 0

Kyle Brindza 33-yard field goal-yard run

 **10:09** *remaining*

Drive: 4 plays, 1 yard, 0:58 elapsed

### NOTRE DAME 10, MICHIGAN 0

Tommy Rees 2-yard run (Brindza kick)

 **1:21** *remaining*

Drive: 8 plays, 48 yards, 4:49 elapsed

### 3 NO SCORING DRIVES

### 4 NOTRE DAME 10, MICHIGAN 3

Brandon Gibbons 33-yard field goal

 **13:10** *remaining*

Drive: 14 plays, 42 yards, 7:40 elapsed

### NOTRE DAME 13, MICHIGAN 3

Kyle Brindza 39-yard field goal

 **6:46** *remaining*

Drive: 11 plays, 53 yards, 6:24 elapsed

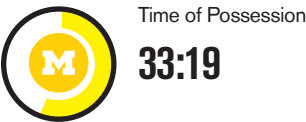
### NOTRE DAME 13, MICHIGAN 6

Brandon Gibbons 31-yard field goal

 **3:27** *remaining*

Drive: 11 plays, 56 yards, 3:19 elapsed

## STATISTICS



PASSING				
Robinson Smith	13-24-138	Rees Golson	8-11-115	
	0-1-0		3-8-30	

RUSHING				
Robinson	26-90	Riddick	17-52	
Toussaint	13-61	Wood	7-39	
Gallon	2-13	Atkinson	4-4	

RECEIVING				
Gardner	3-40	Riddick	5-32	
Gallon	3-33	Daniels	3-40	
Roundtree	3-30	Jones	2-35	
Funchess	2-11	Eifert	1-38	

TACKLES				
Kovacs	7	Jackson	9	
Morgan	7	Te'o	8	
Gordon	6	Spond	7	
Demens	6	Motta	6	
Ryan	5	Lewis-Moore	6	
Floyd	5	Calabrese	5	
Campbell	4	Fox	4	
Washington	3	Day	3	
Roh	3	Nix	3	

INTERCEPTIONS				
Taylor	1	Te'o	2	
Gordon	1	Russell	1	
		Baratti	1	
		Jackson	1	

## Robinson struggles in loss

By **JOSEPH MONARDO**  
Sports Writer

The Irish defense forced Michigan senior quarterback Denard Robinson into four interceptions and one fumble while also sacking him three times.

Robinson accumulated just 138 yards through the air on 13-for-24 passing, never completing a pass longer than 20 yards. The Irish also held the quarterback in check on the ground.

Robinson rushed 26 times for only 90 yards, with a longest rush of 20 yards. In 2010 and 2011 against Notre Dame, Robinson racked up 969 total yards.

### Te'o continues star career

Irish senior linebacker Manti Te'o recorded eight tackles, including one tackle for loss, in Saturday's win. Te'o added two interceptions, as well.

He is the first Notre Dame linebacker to intercept multiple

passes in a single game since Irish linebacker Maurice Crum did so against UCLA in 2007. After entering his final season with no career picks, Te'o has three through four games. Te'o ranks second in the nation in career tackles with 362, averaging 8.2 per game. Te'o trails only Ball State senior linebacker Travis Freeman's 378 career tackles.

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ALEX PARTAK | The Observer

Senior linebacker Manti Te'o hits Michigan senior running back Vincent Smith as Smith throws a pass during Notre Dame's 13-6 win over Michigan on Saturday at Notre Dame Stadium. Irish freshman safety Nicky Baratti, not pictured, intercepted Smith's pass. The interception marked the first of six Wolverine turnovers.

## THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

*The Irish stifled Michigan and senior quarterback Denard Robinson after falling to Robinson's Wolverines each of the past two seasons. Senior linebacker Manti Te'o had another big game for Notre Dame, racking up eight tackles and picking off two passes as the Irish held Michigan out of the end zone. The win over Michigan pushed the Irish into the top 10 for the first time since 2006.*



KIRBY MCKENNA | The Observer

Junior quarterback Tommy Rees throws a pass. Rees finished the game 8-for-11 with 115 yards.



KARLA MORENO | The Observer

Notre Dame gathers before its win over Michigan, which made the Irish 4-0 for the first time since 2002.



ALEX PARTAK | The Observer

Sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt, left, corrals Michigan senior quarterback Denard Robinson.



KARLA MORENO | The Observer

Junior quarterback Tommy Rees avoids a Michigan defender on his way to scoring the game's only touchdown. The score was the first rushing touchdown of Rees' career.



ALEX PARTAK | The Observer

Senior running back Theo Riddick tries to fight off a Michigan tackler and finished the game with 17 carries for 52 yards. He also had five catches for 32 yards.