

IRISH INSIDER

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2013

SHEDDING THE BLOCKS

Bennett Jackson completes transition to starting cornerback and captain



THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Zachary Llorens and Steph Wulz

RECRUITING

Tranquill visits, Irish extend offers

By **MIKE MONACO**
Sports Editor

Fort Wayne, Ind., native Drue Tranquill took an official visit to Notre Dame for the Michigan State game, and the Irish made a good impression on the 6-foot-3, 207-pounder, according to Notre Dame recruiting expert Mike Frank.

Tranquill, who committed to Purdue on July 23rd and received an offer from Notre Dame soon thereafter, had reportedly expressed concern over his position — either linebacker or safety — with the Irish. Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliated Irish Sports Daily, said he thinks Notre Dame alleviated Tranquill's concerns.

"Notre Dame reiterated their stance on where they see him defensively," Frank said. "They've basically said, 'You're being recruited as a defensive player and wherever you work out the best is where you're going to play. If you look good at safety and that's where you want to start out, well then that's what we'll take a look at and see if that works. If it does, you'll stay there. If not, we'll look at other options.'"

"I think it was important for him to hear he'd get a chance to play other positions and he

in the nation, according to ESPN, and Hall checks in at No. 191. Hilliard, who cracks the top 150 at No. 145, hails from Cincinnati. Frank said he thinks Hilliard's decision will come down to Ohio State and Notre Dame and that the linebacker's comfort level with each team's players could play a huge factor in the choice.

Recently, the Irish have extended more offers to members of the class of 2015, driving the number of offered prospects up to 26, per Irish Sports Daily. Of those 26 players, Frank said some of the most interesting prospects are Hilliard, cornerback John Reid, defensive end/linebacker Jashon Cornell, defensive tackle Rasheem Green, offensive lineman Tristen Hoge and quarterback Torrance Gibson.

"[Gibson] kind of fits exactly what they're looking for right now," Frank said. "There's a bunch of other guys they're looking at [for] quarterback right now, but he's kind of the mobile guy that fits and looks like what they're looking for."

ESPN ranks Gibson as 25th-best player in the nation.

Only one player in the class of 2015 — offensive lineman Jerry Tillery, has committed to Notre

"It would not surprise me if [safety/linebacker Drue Tranquill] flipped from Purdue to Notre Dame and fairly soon."

Mike Frank
Notre Dame recruiting expert

wasn't going to get pigeonholed into one specific position. So I think that that really helped their chances. I would say it would not surprise me if he flipped from Purdue to Notre Dame and fairly soon."

Tranquill had the chance to spend time with the two other visiting members of the class of 2014, linebacker Jonathan Bonner and receiver Justin Brent, both of whom are already committed to Notre Dame.

"I think Notre Dame kind of put their best foot forward," Frank said. "[Tranquill] got to hang out with Jonathan Bonner and Justin Brent and I think he really felt like he fit in with those guys."

As for Bonner and Brent, meanwhile, Frank said he believes they had a "wonderful" time on their visits and solidified their opinions on Notre Dame. Frank said he would be shocked if either player reneged on his commitment.

The Irish also hosted three players from the class of 2015: Quarterback Jack Beneventi, linebacker Justin Hilliard and running back Darrin Hall. Beneventi is the No. 273 player

Dame thus far. Tillery, the 6-foot-7, 312-pounder from Shreveport, La., will make a visit to South Bend this weekend.

"Obviously Tillery is a very important recruit and he's a guy that they've loved and think is just a tremendous prospect," Frank said. "So it's important to get Jerry Tillery up on campus as much as they can and around the offensive linemen so he feels comfortable up here. It's a long way from South Bend to [Louisiana]. Sometimes these guys can feel a little disconnected after awhile so it is important to get these guys on campus and around each other and just feeling more comfortable and at home. So I think that's important for him to come up and have a good visit and just solidify in his head the reasons he chose ND."

For more on Notre Dame recruiting, check out Mike Frank's irishsportsdaily.com

Email Mike at mikefrank18@sbcglobal.net and tell him *The Observer* sent you.

Contact Mike Monaco at jmonaco@nd.edu

COMMENTARY

ND can change in one game



Mike Monaco
Sports Editor

Think back to late October of 2012.

Notre Dame was roughly a 10-point underdog to Oklahoma leading up to their top-10 clash in Norman, Okla., on Oct. 27.

Manti Te'o was still crafting his Heisman candidacy.

Everett Golson was still developing as the first-year signal-caller for Brian Kelly.

The defense had bent but not broke, surrendering yards but not points.

The Irish were 7-0, but people still weren't convinced that Notre Dame was excellent, or even relevant.

But one game can change everything. Golson connected on a 50-yard bomb with Chris Brown and plunged in for a 1-yard go-ahead touchdown later in the drive. Te'o sealed the victory with a late interception. The defense limited Landry Jones and the Sooners to 13 points. Just like that, Golson was finding himself as the quarterback, Te'o was placed squarely in the Heisman conversation, the defense was legitimate and the Irish were for real.

Fast-forward to Oklahoma week 2013, and a similar uncertainty swirls around this Notre Dame squad. Kelly has talked about his team finding its identity, and he continues to insist the Irish

are not a finished product. And if the matchup with Oklahoma in 2012 taught us anything, it's that a lot can change with one game.

Last season, it was more of a perception change. "Ok," we said, "Notre Dame defeated the Sooners convincingly. It was 30-13. It was in Norman. It was in primetime. This team is for real now." But it was, by and large, the same Irish team that had been playing the same Irish football the whole season. People just began to truly believe after the statement win over the Sooners.

This season, it will need to be more than just a perception change to return to a 2012-level of prominence. Notre Dame has legitimate problems and unanswered questions.

Most notably and importantly, the defense has been bad at worst and inconsistent at best. The middle linebacker and safety rotations are still in flux.

Offensively, the Irish have struggled to run the ball. A definitive pecking order in the backfield has yet to crystalize, and the passing game has yet to prove it can carry the load when teams unflinchingly stack the box.

But as we learned last year, nothing is steadfast; performance and perception are subject to change. And, really, that's the way football always is. Uncertainty and fluidity are the underpinnings of the sport. Michigan looked like a BCS-caliber team

in dropping 41 points on the Irish three weeks back. Now the Wolverines look like a low-end top-25 squad after barely squeaking by Akron and Connecticut in consecutive weeks. It's why more and more coaches and media members alike bash the perceived importance of preseason — or even early-season — polls.

It's too early to write the final chapter on Notre Dame. The Irish have played one-third of their regular season. The story on Notre Dame can drastically change, for better or worse, by 7 p.m. on Saturday.

The Irish are again seeking answers to some of the same question marks that popped up heading into Oklahoma week 2012.

Will an inside linebacker emerge to lead the defense, or at least the linebacking corps, like Te'o led last season? If so, who will it be?

Will Tommy Rees increase efficiency, limit turnovers and silence critics, like Golson did?

Will the defense be as stout as it was against Michigan State and take a huge leap in consistency?

Uncertainty surrounds the Irish, certainly. But uncertainty should not be confused with finality.

Contact Mike Monaco at jmonaco@nd.edu

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

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

It's Back... Papa's Hand-Tossed

BUFFALO CHICKEN PIZZA

Large only **\$10**
ONLINE CODE: P910

2013 AWARD WINNER
MENU MASTERS

PAPA JOHN'S
Better Ingredients.
Better Pizza.

EARN FREE PIZZA FAST.
Papa Rewards.
@PAPAJOHNS.COM
Enroll Today!

OFFICIAL PIZZA SPONSOR OF THE NFL

Offer good for a limited time at participating Papa John's restaurants. No double dipping or extra charges. Certain toppings may be excluded from special offer pizzas or require additional charge. Not valid with any other coupons or discounts. Limited delivery area. Delivery fee may apply. Customer responsible for all applicable taxes. Prices may vary in Alaska and Hawaii. © 2013 Papa John's International, Inc. All Rights Reserved. 98131 BC

THE JIG

\$9⁹⁹

Large
3-Topping Pizza

Online Promo Code: SVM2
Expires 5/31/2014

Papa Johns Delivers Domer Dollars!

Domer Dollars & Munch Money
Now Accepted At Our Campus Location
1827 South Bend Avenue

Valid on Regular Menu Price and not valid with any other coupons or discounts
Orders Cannot Be Placed Online

Carry-Out OR Delivery

SHAMROCK SPECIAL

\$24⁹⁹

Three Large
1-Topping Pizzas

Online Promo Code: SVM11
Expires 5/31/2014

THE KILT

\$10⁴⁹

Extra Large
1-Topping Pizza

Online Promo Code: SVM10
Expires 5/31/2014

271-1177

Papa Johns South Bend

@PapaJohns_SB

IRISH BELLE

\$9⁹⁹

Two Orders of Breadsticks
& a 2 Liter of Pepsi Product

Online Promo Code: SVM8
Expires 5/31/2014

THE CORNERSTONE

By **MATTHEW DeFRANKS**
Assistant Managing Editor

Nothing is new to Bennett Jackson anymore — not a different role, not a different position, not even different sports.

He's used to it. The senior cornerback has risen to captain, switched sides of the ball and juggled sports in his four years at Notre Dame, marking one of the most versatile careers of any Irish player in recent history.

But none of this is new.

Leading is old

Prior to the season, Jackson was named one of three Irish captains, joining senior receiver TJ Jones and graduate student tackle Zack Martin. But Jackson is the only man with a "C" on the defensive side of the ball.

If you thought a simple letter on a jersey would change Jackson's approach, you'd be wrong.

"At the end of the day, I was really that guy last year," Jackson said. "I was just as vocal, just as energetic. It's just Manti was just that main focus, that strength,

strong point in the defense. I just try to be as vocal as I can, as energetic as I can, as communicative as I can and just keep things rolling."

Last season was Jackson's first as a starter with the Irish and he helped anchor a secondary that included three first-time starters. This season, though, he's the man on the back end of the defense, he's the lockdown corner, he's the voice.

Irish coach Brian Kelly said Jackson has been hard on himself since being a captain.

"It has a tendency to put a little bit more pressure on you," he said. "You don't want to let anybody down. You want to live up to the incredible history and tradition of being a captain here at Notre Dame."

Jackson has transformed himself from first-time starter into a statistical hybrid in just one season. He is only behind the inside linebackers in tackles and behind only defensive linemen in sacks.

But racking up stats is nothing compared to switching positions.

Switching positions is old

Jackson used to be a running back — when he was six-years old.

He scored his first-ever touchdown at the position, dashing in from 60 yards out and adding a heel-click and a skip as he crossed the goal line.

Then, Jackson was a receiver. He was an All-State wideout in high school and came to Notre Dame as the second-best receiver from New Jersey.

Jackson was buried on the

depth chart, however, and saw playing time primarily on special teams as a freshman, returning kickoffs with his current secondary-mate Austin Collinsworth. He averaged 22 yards per return and said he still occasionally thinks about returning kicks again.

"Of course sometimes I'm like 'Damn, I wish I would have gotten that kick return,'" he said. "At the end of the day, I'm so focused on what I'm trying to get done and what I need to do that I don't really pay too much attention."

Jackson is now trying to stop opposing offenses doing what he did to defenses as both a Mighty Mite and a high-school star. Before his sophomore season, Jackson switched sides over to defense as a cornerback and has not looked back.

"I love playing corner," he said. "Just comparing it from a corner to a receiver, I just feel like it's a lot harder of a job. I just enjoy it really. I'm glad you get a chance to hit people. I didn't necessarily like running across the middle as a receiver and getting blasted."

The film, television and theater major said trusting the coaches was key in making the change.

"You're open to just going, open to coaching and just loving coach push you around and show you different places you fit," he said. "I really just trusted them and worked as hard as I could to get better at that position, which was frustrating a little at first but now down the road, it definitely is an advantage."

Jackson is now in his third year since the transition and

has become more and more comfortable with his play.

"I feel like I've played a lot more confidently this year," Jackson said. "I kind of know there's no receiver that's going to run past me or what not if I'm on my game. I feel like I've played similarly. Just last year, I had a little more of a faster start with just being in the right place with the interceptions."

Former Notre Dame cornerback Shane Walton, the last Irish All-American at the position, said cornerbacks need to have a unique mindset to play the position successfully.

"You're playing a position where you're supposed to get beaten every once in a while," Walton said. "To have a mentality that I'm not going to get beaten and still get beaten, and then I'm not going to get beaten again, you definitely have to have a different mentality."

"It's almost like being a distance runner. ... I think that these guys mentally are so strong and so strong-willed, it's almost what a corner has to be. Their minds have to be so powerful and so strong-willed, the mindset has to be that it's not going to happen again."

Jackson knows all about track athletes.

Switching sports is old

As a sophomore, Jackson (along with George and Josh Atkinson) began to run track. The Hazlet, N.J., native competed in four indoor meets for the Irish, running the 60-meter hurdles.

The speedster ran a personal-best 8.12 in the event before focusing exclusively on football. Jackson said he simply did not have time for track but still sees some similarities between sprinting and cornerback.

"I guess in a way, just being an individual," Jackson said. "As a corner, a lot of times, you're on that island and you kind of just react."

"I was just running track because I just loved having that individual aspect of my life, relying on myself. I think it definitely helps me at corner. When I'm at corner, I'm on my own basically, the majority of the time."

In high school, Jackson also played point guard on the basketball team and had previously played soccer and baseball. Two sports is not as hard when you have already played five.

Now, everything is old for Jackson.

He's been a leader long before a letter told him he was. He's in his third season on defense and second as a starter. He's not thinking about track anymore.

He's used to it.

Contact Matthew DeFranks at mdefrank@nd.edu

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

HOSTED BY THE NOTRE DAME ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



PRESENTED BY **Sprint**

JOIN US FRIDAY 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Tent north of Bookstore/Eck Visitors Center

Notre Dame family and fans are invited to enjoy a full tailgate menu, live music, and the chance to win a pair of pre-game sideline passes for Saturday.

This week's free Football Fridays events and performances include:

Noon-1 p.m., Donald Savoie

ND faculty member whose music style is steeped in Memphis R & B, Motown, and Detroit boogie

2-3 p.m., Steve Foresman

Rock, folk, classic country, and R&B

3:30-4:30 p.m., Tim Stop

Singer/songwriter whose music ranges from acoustic pop to high energy electric rock

4:30 p.m., Notre Dame Spirit

Welcome the Notre Dame Irish Cheerleaders and Leprechaun

2-3 p.m., On The Sidelines Academic Series in Eck Visitors Center

Rev. Paul Kollman, C.S.C., '84, '90 M.Div, Executive Director of the Center for Social Concerns & Associate Professor of Theology, presents:

Building Faithful Discipleship at Notre Dame Today

Fr. Paul Kollman will talk about how the Center for Social Concerns, in cooperation with many others including the Alumni Association, works to foster the formation of faith and global responsibility among our students through service and reflection.

\$1 HOT DOGS
& other fresh food

LIVE MUSIC
performed by alumni & students

COME LEARN
talk @ 2 pm in Eck

RECONNECT
with classmates & friends

WIN PASSES
register to win pre-game sideline passes



Observer File Photo



Observer File Photo

SOONERS PASSING

Last year, Notre Dame allowed its first rushing touchdown of the season to the “Belldozer” in one of his four carries on the night. He was 1-for-1 passing for eight yards. This year, the Irish will have to deal with Sooners quarterback Blake Bell a lot more. Bell is coming off a winning effort against Tulsa in which he threw for 413 yards and four touchdowns on 27-of-37 passing in his first career start. Irish coach Brian Kelly was clear in his weekly press conference that the Irish view Bell as a passing threat, not just the rushing threat he was last year.

The 6-foot-6, 252-pounder under center is just one part of Oklahoma’s explosive offense. The Sooners are averaging 490.3 yards-per-game this season. Sophomore receiver Sterling Shepard leads the team with 11 receptions and 146 yards on the season and reined in 15 passes for 181 yards last year against Notre Dame. However, the Irish got the win by keeping everything in front of them. Bell does not have the resume of former Sooner Landry Jones, but the Irish will have to account for his ability to extend plays with his legs or take off with his legs.

It seems as though Notre Dame has gotten things together just in time in the secondary, as last week’s solid performance bodes well for how the Irish will handle Bell and the Sooners. If Notre Dame can get pressure on the quarterback, the back line is likely to find an interception from the inexperienced Bell.

EDGE: EVEN

SOONERS RUSHING

The Sooners are second in the Big 12 with 271.1 rushing yards-per-game, largely on the effort of senior running back Brennan Clay. Clay has accumulated 284 yards on 45 carries, good for 5.8 yard-per-attempt. Oklahoma also has three other rushers with at least 110 yards this season and Bell has added 55 yards on the ground himself.

Notre Dame’s defense matches up well with Oklahoma’s running attack, though. The Irish have limited their opponents to 114.2 yards-per-game this season. Oklahoma is likely to gain more than the 15 yards it managed last season

against the Irish, but Notre Dame’s stout defense can limit the Sooners’ effectiveness on the ground. Bell’s size and mobility could be an issue though, based on Notre Dame’s early-season struggles against mobile quarterbacks Connor Reilly of Temple and Devin Gardner of Michigan.

EDGE: EVEN

SOONERS OFFENSIVE COACHING

As Sooners coach Bob Stoops approaches the all-time victory record at Oklahoma (currently held by Barry Switzer), it is hard to pick against his offensive coaching staff. Stoops has racked up 17 coach of the year mentions, including eight on the national level. Stoops has coached Heisman winners along the way and trotted out a fearsome offense almost without fail. Irish defensive coordinator Bob Diaco is stiff competition, but given that the Irish are still trying to find the right 11 to put on the field, Notre Dame is playing from behind in this category.

EDGE: OKLAHOMA

SOONERS SPECIAL TEAMS

Redshirt junior kicker Michael Hunnicutt has hit eight of his nine field-goal attempts this year, although his long is 44 yards. Junior kicker Nick Hodgson has sent 15 of his 22 kickoffs for touchbacks, which could take George Atkinson and the Irish return game out of the equation. Junior punter Jed Barnett is averaging 44.1 yards per punt this season, while senior receiver Jalen Saunders has a return average of 13.5 yards in eight punt returns this season.

EDGE: OKLAHOMA

SOONERS SCHEDULE (3-0)

Aug. 31	Louisiana-Monroe	W	34-0
Sept. 7	West Virginia	W	16-7
Sept. 14	Tulsa	W	51-20
Sept 28	@ Notre Dame		
Oct. 5	TCU		
Oct. 12	vs. Texas		
Oct. 19	@ Kansas		
Oct. 26	Texas Tech		
Nov. 7	@ Baylor		
Nov. 16	Iowa State		
Nov. 23	@ Kansas State		
Dec. 7	@ Oklahoma State		

HEAD T

3:30 P.M.

NOTRE DAME STADIUM

NO. 14 OKLAHOMA



(Sr.) **Lacolton Bester** ¹¹ **WR**
(Fr.) Dannon Cavil 6

(R-Jr.) **Tyrus Thompson** ⁷¹ **LT**
(R-So.) Derek Farniok 72

(R-Jr.) **Adam Shead** ⁷⁴ **LG**
(Jr.) Dionte Savage 77

(R-Sr.) **Gabe Ikard** ⁶⁴ **C**
(So.) Ty Darlington 56

(Sr.) **Bronson Irwin** ⁶⁸ **RG**
(R-So.) Nila Kasitati 54

(R-Jr.) **Darby Williams** ⁷⁹ **RT**
(R-So.) Derek Farniok 72

(Sr.) **Brannon Green** ⁸² **TE**
(R-Fr.) Connor Knight 89

(So.) **Sterling Shepard** ³ **WR**
(R-Fr.) Derrick Woods 12

(Sr.) **Jalen Saunders** ⁸ **WR**
(So.) Trey Metoyer 17



(Sr.) **Aaron Colvin** ¹⁴ **CB**
(Fr.) Stanvon Taylor 6

(R-Jr.) **Julian Wilson** ² **NIC**
(Sr.) Kass Everett 23

(Jr.) **Quentin Hayes** ¹⁰ **SS**
(Fr.) Ahmad Thomas 13

(So.) **Charles Tapper** ⁹¹ **DE**
(Fr.) Matt Dimon 90

(R-So.) **Frank Shannon** ²⁰ **MLB**
(So.) Eric Striker 19

(R-So.) **Jordan Phillips** ⁸⁰ **NT**
(Jr.) Quincy Russell 95

(R-Sr.) **Gabe Lynn** ⁹ **FS**
(R-Jr.) Trey Franks 32

(R-Jr.) **Geneo Grissom** ⁸⁵ **DE**
(R-Sr.) Chaz Nelson 99

(So.) **Eric Striker** ¹⁹ **OLB**

(Sr.) **Corey Nelson** ⁷ **OLB**
(R-Fr.) Aarn Franklin 25

(R-Fr.) **Zack Sanchez** ¹⁵ **CB**
(R-So.) Cortez Johnson 22



(R-Jr.) **Michael Hunnicutt** ¹⁸ **PK**

(Jr.) **Nick Hodgson** ³⁹ **KO**

(Jr.) **Jed Barnett** ⁴⁴ **P**

(Sr.) **Brennan Clay** ²⁴ **KR**
(Sr.) Roy Finch 22

(Sr.) **Jalen Saunders** ⁸ **PR**
(So.) Sterling Shepard 3

(Sr.) **Austin Woods** ⁵⁰ **LS**
(R-Fr.) Connor Knight 89



Andrew Gastelum
Editor-in-Chief

This is one where the Irish will be ready.

I honestly thought they would be surprised by Michigan State last week, turns out I still don’t know who won since there was zero offense and zero fun sir.

This is where they will be truly tested, and everyone will be watching.

This matchup will force the Irish to focus on every play call, down and second.

Unlike Michigan, they will actually be facing a team with more talent than themselves. Add that to the vengeful glare of Bob Stoops and company and the lingering feeling of a BCS-denying loss at home last season.

The Irish will find a way to succeed in their first opportunity as true underdogs, just as they did all year last year.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 33, Oklahoma 27



Matthew DeFranks
Assistant Managing Editor

I think Oklahoma is overrated. I don’t know if they have a run game.

And I don’t know how Blake Bell will fare against one of the best defensive lines in the country.

But I just have a weird feeling about this game. Call it a gut feeling.

Notre Dame has not showed much to the nation this season with a seemingly underachieving defense and a vanilla offense.

And there’s just something about Bob Stoops that has me thinking the Sooners will be ready (but only because it’s not a bowl game).

I think Notre Dame’s 10-game home winning streak comes crashing down courtesy of the Belldozer.

FINAL SCORE: Oklahoma 27, Notre Dame 21



Mike Monaco
Sports Editor

Looking past each team’s rankings, I see two squads in similar situations. Notre Dame is still an unknown entity for the most part. Oklahoma, meanwhile, may be ranked No. 14 in the AP poll, but who have the Sooners really played?

Still, I think the Sooners are quite strong, maybe even deserving of that top-15 ranking. Blake Bell is the right man for the quarterback job, and the skill-position players are talented and plentiful.

Say what you want about Notre Dame’s offensive struggles, but I think its defense will be the key. Can the Irish stop that skilled Sooner offense and play as they did against Michigan State, or will Bell pick apart the defense with a Devin Gardner-like ease?

I’m thinking closer to the latter.

FINAL SCORE: Oklahoma 30, Notre Dame 24

0 HEAD

ON NBC

NO. 22 NOTRE DAME



WEI LIN | The Observer



ALLISON D'AMBROSIA | The Observer

CB **6** KeiVarae Russell (So.)

23 Lo Wood (Sr.)

OLB **9** Jaylon Smith (Fr.)

30 Ben'Councell (Jr.)

DE **91** Sheldon Day (So.)

90 Isaac Rochell (Fr.)

NG **1** Louis Nix (Sr.)

96 Kona Schwenke (Sr.)

DE **7** Stephon Tuitt (Jr.)

94 Jarron Jones (So.)

OLB **55** Prince Shembo (Sr.)

11 Ishaq Williams (Jr.)

CB **2** Bennett Jackson (Sr.)

36 Cole Luke (Fr.)

WR **7** TJ Jones (Sr.)

88 Corey Robinson (Fr.)

WR **10** DaVaris Daniels (Jr.)

87 Daniel Smith (Sr.)

RT **78** Ronnie Stanley (So.)

79 Steve Elmer (Fr.)

RG **74** Christian Lombard (Sr.)

65 Conor Hanratty (Jr.)

C **72** Nick Martin (Jr.)

77 Matt Hegarty (Jr.)

LG **66** Chris Watt (Gr.)

75 Mark Harrell (So.)

LT **70** Zack Martin (Gr.)

57 Hunter Bivin (Fr.)

TE **85** Troy Niklas (Jr.)

18 Ben Koyack (Jr.)

WR **2** Chris Brown (So.)

17 James Onwualu (Fr.)

KO **27** Kyle Brindza (Jr.)

KR **4** George Atkinson (Jr.)

33 Cam McDaniel (Jr.)

LS **61** Scott Daly (So.)

PK **27** Kyle Brindza (Jr.)

40 Nick Tausch (Gr.)

P **27** Kyle Brindza (Jr.)

98 Alex Wulfeck (Gr.)

PR **7** TJ Jones (Sr.)

3 Amir Carlisle (Jr.)

IRISH PASSING

Senior quarterback Tommy Rees and the Irish passing attack put on a miserable performance last week against Michigan State, although multiple Spartan pass-interference penalties may have played a part in preventing Notre Dame from connecting on its passes. The good news for the Irish is that Rees probably will be better. In his prior three games the senior quarterback had averaged 326 yards through the air.

If Irish freshman receiver Corey Robinson can carry over his breakout performance while TJ Jones and DaVaris Daniels get back to their productive ways, Notre Dame could use its passing attack to pull off the upset. It won't be easy, though. Oklahoma is first in the Big 12 in pass defense efficiency and second in total scoring defense, having allowed only nine points-per-game through three contests. Sooners redshirt senior safety Gabe Lynn leads the team with two interceptions and also has a fumble recovery on the year. Granted, Notre Dame brings more to the table than University of Louisiana-Monroe, West Virginia and Tulsa, who rank 77th, 72nd and 74th in the nation in passing offense. Notre Dame ranks 28th, but will have to avoid turnovers. Oklahoma has brought down an interception in 73.5-percent of its games under Stoops.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH RUSHING

Irish coach Brian Kelly has listed five running backs atop Notre Dame's depth chart heading into the matchup against Oklahoma, so freshmen Tarean Folston and Greg Bryant will presumably join juniors Cam McDaniel, Amir Carlisle and George Atkinson in the running back rotation against the Sooners. The depth-chart magic by Kelly is a recognition of the fact that no Irish back has gotten it done this year. Atkinson leads the team with his average of five yards-per-carry, but he only has 24 rushes. McDaniel leads the team in rushing attempts and rushing yards with 45 and 169, respectively.

Oklahoma, meanwhile, leads its conference in total defense (291.3 yards-per-game), third-down defense (27.3-percent) and rush defense (100.7 yards-per-game). Senior linebacker Corey Nelson leads the Sooners with 20 tackles on the year and has three tackles-for-loss. Given Oklahoma's hot start in run defense, and the fact that Notre Dame has five options

in the backfield but none competent enough to secure the job, Oklahoma holds the edge here.

EDGE: OKLAHOMA

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

Brian Kelly executed his game plan last week en route to a win against the Spartans. With nine defenders stacking the box on many plays, Kelly instructed the Irish to throw it over the heads of the Michigan State players and challenge the corners in man-to-man coverage. The offensive production was extremely muted for the Irish, but Notre Dame did draw flags from many of its attempts to connect down the field. Sooners defensive coordinator Mike Stoops has had notable success with his units in the past, most notably when he was with the Sooners originally from 1999-2003. Having returned to Oklahoma last season after serving as the head coach at Arizona, Stoops coached his defense to a disappointing season in which the Sooners allowed 398.3 yards-per-game.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior punter Kyle Brindza won the game ball for his fourth-quarter punts against the Spartans, but he averaged only 42.8 yards on four punts. Brindza missed his second field-goal attempt of the season against Michigan State, but remains a reasonably reliable option. TJ Jones showed signs of discomfort at punt return last week, dropping one punt and running into another, although the Irish recovered both. Oklahoma has surrendered only 114 return yards on six kick returns, but Atkinson always has an outside shot of making a big play on special teams.

EDGE: EVEN

IRISH SCHEDULE (3-1)

Aug. 31	Temple	W	28-6
Sept. 7	@ Michigan	L	41-30
Sept. 14	@ Purdue	W	31-24
Sept. 21	Michigan State	W	17-13
Sept. 28	Oklahoma		
Oct. 5	vs. Arizona State		
Oct. 19	USC		
Oct. 26	@ Air Force		
Nov. 2	Navy		
Nov. 9	@ Pittsburgh		
Nov. 23	BYU		
Nov. 30	@ Stanford		



Joseph Monardo
Associate Sports Editor

During last year's matchup with Oklahoma, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Even as the Irish went up 17 in the fourth quarter, it was hard to believe they would hold on for a statement win on the road. Not only did they do that, but what they did after made the win just another entry in a miracle season.

The Irish could use a win over Oklahoma to answer some questions this year too. A victory Saturday would put the Irish on track for a BCS bowl and almost assuredly propel them near the top 15. Too good to be true for a team that still hasn't put it all together through four weeks, right? Right. Notre Dame will hang around, but the Sooners pull it out.

FINAL SCORE: Oklahoma 24, Notre Dame 17



Jack Hefferon
Sports Writer

Oklahoma hasn't had much opportunity to show what it's made of this year, while the Irish have had their opportunities but haven't done much with them.

Blake Bell was the only thing that could breakthrough Notre Dame's front seven early last year, and now the Irish will have to deal with a full dose of the Belldozer on Saturday. Meanwhile, the Irish offense is a huge question mark, as Brian Kelly listed five co-starters at running back, and there's never any telling which Tommy Rees will put on the No. 11 jersey come game time.

Still, the Irish defense showed just enough last week to inspire confidence. Oklahoma was Notre Dame's coming-out party last year, don't be surprised to see a repeat Saturday afternoon.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 24, Oklahoma 23

Who is the biggest diva?
Biggest prankster?
Funniest teammate?
Bennett Jackson tells all
in our new "Lightning
Round" video series at

**youtube.com/
NDSMCObserver**

Three-man rotation at inside LB yields success

By **JACK HEFFERON**
Sports Writer

Grace. Fox. Calabrese.

That's the decision Irish coach Brian Kelly and his staff have faced in trying to determine who will play at their two inside linebacker spots this season.

But it's also a listing, in order, of Notre Dame's top three tacklers this season, meaning the Irish have found an ideal recipe for playing time in the middle of their defense.

"You've got a three-person rotation that's working out pretty good for us," Kelly said. "All three of those guys are working well together."

With the departure of Manti Te'o, the Irish linebacking corps was not expected by many to be the same strength heading into this season that it was in 2012. But struggles in the secondary and double teams on the line have forced junior Jarrett Grace and graduate students Dan Fox and Carlo Calabrese into the spotlight. Grace leads all Notre Dame defenders with 28 tackles, and Fox and Calabrese follow close behind with 27 and 26, respectively.

Grace has been one of the team's most surprising revelations. The Cincinnati native sat behind Te'o for his first two seasons before coming on strong this spring and working his way into the rotation. Kelly said while Grace may have risen back up the depth chart, the junior has always been a key player for the Irish.

"Even though he was behind our best leader in our program, and that has a tendency, obviously, to overshadow you, he led in community service," Kelly said. "He led in fellowship. Now he's starting to become more vocal as a football player as well, and he'll continue to develop in that manner."

Fox and Calabrese were mainstays in the Irish lineup with Te'o, and the two boast over 40 career starts between them. Grace said having two fifth-year players in the same unit has done nothing but help his development and all three have grown together as a unit.

"Something I've learned from Dan and Carlo is they're always taking care of their bodies, addressing every little nick and bump," Grace said. "We're watching film together for hours, extra, every day, and we're getting great vision and clarity when we step on the field. That's something we've really embraced together."

That group improvement has allowed the Irish to run a three-man rotation through their two inside linebacker spots, which has allowed the trio to stay fresh, show different looks and thrive as a group.

"We always err towards the senior first and foremost, and

Dan has played a lot of football for us," Kelly said of the rotation. "That's how great of a team player [Fox] is, that he moves over ... as we continue to get Jarrett some other work."

Such competition for playing time might cause tension or pit a unit against one another. But Grace said he and the two seasoned veterans value the team success too much to succumb to those pressures, and they know the best thing each can do is push the other two on every snap.

"I have just as much invested in this team as these guys do, and we all want to win," he said. "If I can do something that's going to help the team win, I better do it."

Contact Jack Hefferon at
wheffero@nd.edu



JOHN NING | The Observer

Irish graduate student inside linebacker Carlo Calabrese, pictured here in the season-opener against Temple on Aug. 31, is part of a three-man rotation at inside linebacker along with Dan Fox and Jarrett Grace.

PAID ADVERTISEMENT



YOUR HOME FOR FALL!



Come in today for our latest offers
and this week's special rates for Fall 2014!

**Now Leasing spacious floor plans including
our 1 Bedroom, 1 Bedroom with Study, 2 and
3 Bedroom Apartments!**

Only a few 4 Bedroom/4.5 Bathroom Townhomes are
left. Hurry in TODAY!

- Individual Leases
- Fully Furnished
- Private Washer & Dryer
- Cable & WiFi
- Kitchen Appliances
- Bike Storage
- Electronically Controlled Access
- Tanning
- Fitness Center
- Flat Screen TVs
- Free Parking for Residents

IrishRowApartments.com
/IrishRowApartments @IrishRowApts
1855 Vaness Drive | South Bend, IN 46637 | 574.277.6666



“Belldozer” takes over helm of Sooner offense

By **JOSEPH MONARDO**
Associate Sports Editor

On first-and-goal, Blake Bell began moving to his right immediately following the shotgun snap, evaded two Irish defenders, lowered his shoulder into freshman cornerback Keivarae Russell and stretched for the endzone. In Notre Dame's seventh game of the year, Oklahoma's short-yardage quarterback used all of his 6-foot-6, 252-pound frame to run through the stalwart Irish defense for the first time in 2012.

“You don't get the nickname Belldozer for no reason,” Irish junior linebacker Jarrett Grace said.

Despite only recording four carries and throwing a single pass, the Belldozer made his mark on last year's contest in Norman, Okla. This year, the redshirt junior quarterback will be at the helm of a productive Sooner offense as the team travels to Notre Dame (3-1).

Having begun the season as the backup to redshirt freshman Trevor Knight, Bell made his first career start against Tulsa on Sept. 14. After Knight had compiled only 205 passing yards total on a 43.8-percent completion rate in Oklahoma's opening two contests, Bell connected on 27-of-37 passes for 413 yards and four touchdowns. He added 24 yards

on the ground.

“You know, the quarterback position now seems to be solved in their minds, and a challenge there, as well, with Bell,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said in his weekly press conference Tuesday. “He's a guy that obviously can give them the dual threat that you're looking at at the quarterback position today in college football.”

The Sooners (3-0) surround Bell with a dynamic receiving corps, led by sophomore Sterling Shepard, redshirt senior Jaz Reynolds and senior Jalen Saunders. In Bell's first week as the starting quarterback, Shepard hauled in eight passes for 123 yards and found the endzone twice against Tulsa. Reynolds caught four balls for 109 yards while Saunders came down with three completions for 47 yards and a score.

Bell's performance in his debut week at the helm of the Sooner offense showed his ability to do more than just run it between the tackles, Kelly said.

“He threw it to really fast receivers,” he said. “He's got an outstanding receiving corps. You know, he's got a nice touch on the ball, a good presence about him. He looked like a thrower, not a runner. I know he's a big, physical strong kid, and I think

he was used last year more in the goal line offense. He's much more than a goal line offense quarterback. He's a skilled passer of the football, and I think he maybe got a reputation that is not really fitting of who he is. I think he was a five star quarterback, and he can throw the football. There's no question about that.”

The Sooners are still adjusting to life without Landry Jones, who finished his career with Oklahoma last year as the team's all-time leading passer. The current Pittsburgh Steeler finished with 12,218 yards and 92 touchdowns while completing 62.69-percent of his passes. In last year's 30-13 loss to Notre Dame, Jones compiled 356 yards, but threw one interception against no touchdowns.

Now with a dual-threat quarterback under center for the Sooners, Notre Dame will rely on its experiences defending mobile quarterbacks already this year. After Temple quarterback Connor Reilly accumulated 293 total yards against the Irish in the season opener and Michigan quarterback Devin Gardner finished with 376 yards in the Big House, Notre Dame limited dual-threat quarterback Connor Cook of Michigan State to only 135 yards through the air and four yards



Observer File Photo

Notre Dame and Oklahoma, pictured here playing at Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium in 2012, will square off Saturday.

rushing.

“Again, I think from a scheme standpoint, they put you in a position where you have to cover a lot of different scenarios,” Kelly said.

“We've had that for the last couple of weeks. Our staff and [defensive coordinator Bob] Diaco has done a great job of formulating the plan, and we're going to have to have another great one this weekend.”

Still, the Irish realize they will have show up ready to play on

game day against Bell and the prestigious Oklahoma program, Grace said.

“Oklahoma's a whole new set of challenges,” he said. “They have that dual-threat ability ... so we just have to be very assignment correct, because they've got a lot of dangerous weapons.”

“We are going to expect their very best on Saturday.”

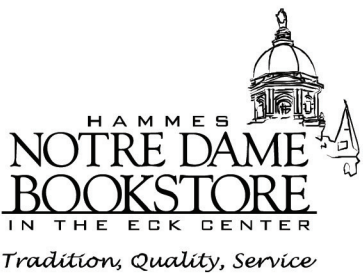
Contact Joseph Monardo at jmonardo@nd.edu

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

ROW | ONE™



Available at:





UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

Mendoza College of Business

Go about *your* business.

Master of Science in Business

You've studied your passion, now make it your life's work. Notre Dame's MSB program bridges your knowledge in science, engineering or liberal arts with vital business skills from one of the nation's premier business schools.

Stop by

Parent and student
info session:

- Sept. 27, 2 pm
- Mendoza, Room 162

To find out more go to:
business.nd.edu/msb

