

# IRISH INSIDER

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2014

## THE EMERGENCE



Tarean Folston  
develops consistency  
in main role

THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Wei Lin and Keri O'Mara



## COMMENTARY

# Notre Dame's season is on the line



**Mary Green**  
Sports Editor

Saturday's matchup against Arizona State will be Notre Dame's biggest and best opportunity to make a statement this season.

However, it will be up to the Irish to determine which type of statement they make to future opponents, fans nationwide and, perhaps most importantly, the College Football Playoff selection committee.

Every team in America can say it doesn't pay attention to the rankings, but those rankings still control whether a team makes it into the playoff and has a chance to contend for a national championship, and Notre Dame is no exception.

That's why this week is so important.

The Irish have won all the games they were supposed to win, outscoring opponents 256-142 in victories. The defense has posted a shutout, the offense has posted more than one blow-out, and Vegas has posted that Everett Golson currently has the fourth-best odds of winning the Heisman Trophy.

That's not bad for a defense that lost seven starters, an offense that is heavily reliant on previously inexperienced sophomores and a quarterback who didn't take a single snap last season.

Not many people gave Notre Dame a serious shot at beating Florida State, especially at the beginning of the season. In the end, the Irish walked away with their first and only loss of the season thus far.

But to anyone who watched, the game was as close as you could come to a victory without actually placing another tally in the win column. It was as quality a loss as any other team in contention for the playoff has had all season.

So why is Notre Dame ranked No. 10 in the country, behind seven other one-loss teams?

For starters, its strength of schedule isn't as difficult as it seemed before. Unfortunately for the Irish, opponents who once seemed formidable — such as Stanford and Michigan — have faded into mediocrity.

The defense has given up a lot of points lately. Notre Dame

didn't surrender more than 17 points in any of its first five games, but since facing North Carolina in mid-October, the team has let opponents score at least 31 points in three consecutive games, including yields of 43 and 39 points.

On a similar note, the Irish have shown their tendency to play to the level and style of their opponents in those last three games, which has both helped and hurt them.

North Carolina was a shootout. Florida State was considered by some to be the best game of the college football season so far. Navy should not have been as close as it was, and as a result, the Irish fell down two spots in the AP poll to No. 8 and were jumped by Arizona State in the College Football Playoff rankings.

And now, at a most convenient time, Arizona State welcomes Notre Dame to Sun Devil Stadium. It's the spark the Irish need to revive a dull patch in their season and rocket them closer to those coveted four spots in the rankings.

If the Irish play to the level of the Sun Devils, this top-10 matchup will be everything viewers could hope for, with two highly potent offenses led by dynamic quarterbacks and talented receivers facing one another.

A win would shoot Notre Dame closer to the top. It would undoubtedly pass Arizona State and could leapfrog at least one other team, since the victory would be against the country's No. 9 squad.

However, a loss would signal the end of any hopes Notre Dame has of making the playoff. Yes, Arizona State is a quality opponent, so the loss would not be a crazy upset, but it is difficult to imagine a two-loss team outside the SEC West playing for a championship, at least at this point in the season.

A win could make the season. A loss would break it.

The Irish season is on the line, and their fate lies in their hands only. It's time for them to show us if they're championship material or not.

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

## RECRUITING

# QB Wimbush, WR Guyton excelling in senior years



Photo courtesy of Blue & Gold Illustrated, 247Sports

**Class of 2015 quarterback Brandon Wimbush committed to Notre Dame in October after flipping from Penn State. Irish recruiting analyst Tom Loy said Wimbush is "a five-star quarterback in [his] book."**

By **MIKE MONACO**  
Senior Sports Writer

Amid the seemingly never-ending stream of commitments, visits and other activity during the past few weeks, attention hasn't always been directed at Notre Dame's current group of 21 pledges in the class of 2015.

But many Irish commits have compiled strong senior seasons as they get set to don the blue and gold next year in South Bend. Irish recruiting analyst Tom Loy said class of 2015 quarterback commitment Brandon Wimbush has been one of the most impressive players in the country this season, much less the Irish class.

"I wouldn't say that he's surprised me with his performance, but Brandon Wimbush has taken his game to another level," said Loy, who covers Notre Dame recruiting for Blue and Gold Illustrated, part of the 247Sports network. "His overall play as a whole, he's not only throwing the ball with arm strength and ball speed, but he's throwing the ball so accurate."

Wimbush, the No. 4 dual-threat quarterback and No. 63 overall player in the country, according to 247Sports' Composite Rankings for the class of 2015, announced his flip from Penn State to Notre Dame on Oct. 7. Many believed the Irish would not land a quarterback in the class after former commitment and five-star prospect Blake Barnett flipped to Alabama in June. Barnett is the No. 1 dual-threat signal-caller in the country, per 247Sports' Composite Rankings.

"You compare their numbers to their senior season, it looks like Wimbush may be the better prospect," Loy said. "Regardless of what any recruiting [outlet] calls him, he's a five-star quarterback in my book. He's arguably the top player at his position in 2015. You could say Notre Dame got a huge steal late in the recruiting process and a potential difference-maker at the quarterback position."

Loy said he has been somewhat surprised by the play of class of 2015 receiver commitment Jalen Guyton this season.

The three-star pledge checks in as the No. 494 overall player in the nation, per 247Sports' Composite Rankings. Loy said Guyton had an "average to good" junior season, highlighted by a strong post-season at Allen High School in Texas. This season, Guyton has teamed with his quarterback, Texas A&M commit and five-star prospect Kyler Murray, to form a strong duo through the air.

"He's just been dominant. He looks faster. He's playing with more confidence," Loy said of Guyton. "He's added size. ... Now you look at him and you see a guy that can step in and compete for playing time as a freshman. He goes from looking like depth at the wide-receiver position to a game-changer, potentially a difference-maker on offense for the Irish. He's been a pleasant surprise."

Among other current Notre Dame commitments who could potentially contribute right away as freshmen, Loy mentioned center Tristen Hoge, cornerback Shaun Crawford, receiver C.J. Sanders and linebackers Josh Barajas, Tevon Coney and Asmar Bilal. Loy added that three-star cornerback Nick Coleman could surprise Irish fans.

Loy has said he could see Notre Dame taking a class of 25 commitments in this recruiting cycle. He said he doesn't expect someone to come from completely off the radar as the end of the season nears and creeps toward National Signing Day, but long shots like cornerbacks Minkah Fitzpatrick and Iman Marshall, safety Marvell Tell and defensive tackle Christian Wilkins shouldn't be completely ruled out.

"Those are guys that are very much perceived as long shots at this point, but they could surprise you," Loy said. "I could see any one of those guys choosing Notre Dame come signing day."

Nonetheless, Loy said there's value for Notre Dame even in just being under consideration in some scenarios, especially with blue-chip recruits from states like Florida, Texas and California.

"You get a kid on campus, it's still a win," Loy said. "It shows nationally that Notre Dame is worth a visit. ... You don't always have to sign a kid to make it a win in recruiting."

Class of 2016 quarterback Malik Henry announced Wednesday he will be committing Thursday afternoon. Loy, who once thought Henry would end up at Notre Dame, thinks that has changed.

"My guess would be that he's going to Florida State at this point," Loy said of Henry's decision. "A lot can change in a week, but it seems like ever since Brandon Wimbush committed to Notre Dame last month, it seems like the priority has been to just focus on Wimbush going forward and then slow the recruitment of 2016."

Loy said Notre Dame is also interested in class of 2016 quarterbacks Jawon Pass and Shea Patterson.

For more on Notre Dame recruiting, check out [BlueAndGold.com](http://BlueAndGold.com). Email Andrew Owens at [aowens@blueandgold.com](mailto:aowens@blueandgold.com) and tell him The Observer sent you.

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Photo courtesy of Blue & Gold Illustrated, 247Sports

**Class of 2016 five-star quarterback Malik Henry said Wednesday he will announce his college decision Thursday.**

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# MAKING the MOST OF IT

By **BRIAN HARTNETT**  
Managing Editor

For sophomore running back Tarean Folston, a few more carries went a long way.

As a freshman last season, the Cocoa, Florida native, who was ranked as a four-star recruit by several services, including 247Sports, showed early flashes of his potential, including a 36-yard run in Notre Dame's 35-21 loss to Oklahoma. But it wasn't until the team's ninth game of the season against Navy that Folston showed that he could be a featured running back.

That game, he ran for 140 yards and one touchdown on 18 carries, nearly equal to the 22 carries he had received in the team's first eight games. Folston said playing extensively against Navy allowed him to validate what he had been working on in practice.

"I guess I got into a little rhythm," he said. "But, you know, I work hard all the time, and it showed up that game, and I try to continue to play at that ability."

Folston kept up his high level of play throughout the remainder of the season, scoring a touchdown in his first career start against BYU and adding another score against Rutgers in the Pinstripe Bowl. Folston said the late-season success inspired him to work hard in the offseason.

"I just continued to work hard," he said. "It's just one of those things where you had a great moment, you can't just let that go away. You've just got to work and try to have more moments like those."

Folston entered this season competing for carries with senior captain Cam McDaniel and fellow sophomore Greg Bryant. He spent the first quarter of the season splitting carries in the backfield but struggling to find success — earning just 17 yards against Michigan, 22 against Purdue and 41 against Syracuse.

But then, just like last season, Folston made the case to put the ball in his hands more

often. And he hasn't stopped proving his point since then, recording 98 rushing yards and three touchdowns against North Carolina, 120 yards against Florida State and 149 yards and two touchdowns last weekend versus Navy.

Irish senior quarterback Everett Golson said Folston's newfound success has come from his development as a player.

"He's definitely gaining that

improved play of the revamped offensive line. Rather, he said it's been a byproduct of the team's development over the course of the season.

"At the beginning of the season, everyone starts off slow," he said. "But we continue to work hard and be more of a complete team. That's all it is, not better nor worse."

Though he spends the majority of his time running between tackles or trying to get to the edge, Folston said his biggest strength is his ability to catch the ball in the backfield.

The 5-foot-9, 209-pounder has caught 12 passes for 166 yards this season.

Others around the Notre Dame program, however, had different

confidence

— I think, just talking generally, that's the biggest thing for a lot of these players," Golson said. "... But I think Tarean definitely got that even from last year. This year, coming in, going out, playing good and things like that. I think he's definitely matured in that aspect."

But Folston said there was no single moment or realization that helped spark his recent play.

"I come out with the same mentality every week — just work hard, grind it out and come out with the 'W' at the end of the day," he said.

Similarly, Folston said his success hasn't been built by the

answers to that question.

"I think he more works with us as a running back, just reading our blocks and just helping us set up our own blocks, forcing the defender to come to us, where we want him," Irish junior offensive lineman Ronnie Stanley said of Folston.

Irish head coach Brian Kelly praised Folston's attention to detail in his Oct. 7 press conference.

"[Folston] does little things sometimes that don't show up in the stat sheet that as coaches, we really appreciate," Kelly said. "He really is an accomplished player, and he's less about potential, and he's more in that production, as well."

If Folston wants to emphasize his receiving ability, he can be forgiven. Folston made receptions on both offense and defense throughout his time at Cocoa High School, recording eight receptions for 85 yards and four interceptions in his senior season. Folston, who played both cornerback and safety in the 2013 Under Armour All-America Game, said he picked up a defensive mentality from his father, James Folston, a former NFL linebacker who played for both the Oakland Raiders and Arizona Cardinals.

"My dad, he's all for me and whatever I want to do, and as far as giving me knowledge, he gave me knowledge both defensively and offensively throughout high school," Folston said. "... He did help me out with a lot of defensive things, taught me a lot of stuff, but on the flip side, he helped me out with offensive stuff also."

Although he is firmly entrenched at running back, Folston hasn't completely lost his desire to play defense or field kicks, which he did throughout high school.

"I wouldn't have a problem with [playing defense]," he said. "I'm here to help the team in any way possible, so if they decide to put me on defense, I'd be happy to do whatever they ask me to do — kickoffs, kick returns, anything."

For now, Folston has been asked to claim the lion's share of carries. But he rejected any notion that he is Notre Dame's No. 1 running back, insisting that the

offseason competition between he, McDaniel and Bryant has not yet come to a close.

"We all come out every day and just work hard," Folston said. "... It's always been a wide-open race, and it always will be."

Folston said the so-called competition among the running backs has never been anything but friendly, as the three players involved spend much time together off the field.

"When we are [together], it's a brotherhood," he said. "We do everything together — we usually eat together, watch film together, stuff like that."

This spirit of competitive friendliness extends to Folston's relationship with Bryant, who hails from the same region of Florida as Folston.

"... We've been tight since the first summer when we were roommates," Folston said. "We've always had that bond, not just because we're both running backs but because we come from the same area. We know things, and we both just want to be successful."

Folston and the Irish will try to build on this season's success when they travel to face one-loss Arizona State on Saturday. For Folston, who was squarely in the midst of the recruiting cycle when Notre Dame reached the BCS National Championship Game in 2013, a win against the Sun Devils would be an opportunity for him to move one step closer to a goal he's envisioned since starting Notre Dame.

"We've had the [national championship] in our mind the whole time," he said. "... We're stepping up to the occasion and playing big-time teams and big-time games and coming out with the 'W.' We just want to continue to do that and make this run for the championship."

And if the Irish are to make such a run, they'll need to make sure the carries for their top rusher go a long way.

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KEVIN SONG | The Observer



KEVIN SONG | The Observer

### IRISH PASSING

Last weekend, senior quarterback Everett Golson became the first Irish quarterback to have three passing and three rushing touchdowns in the same game. Golson's name is still in the Heisman conversation and for good reason — he has thrown for at least 300 yards and three touchdowns in each of his last three games.

Golson has been complimented by the continued development of his receiving corps — three different receivers caught touchdown passes against Navy. And sophmore receiver Will Fuller has put his name among the nation's most productive receivers, as he's currently tied for fourth in the FBS with nine touchdown catches.

Arizona State's pass defense has been solid, particularly recently — the Sun Devils held Utah to only 57 passing yards last weekend. But the Sun Devils secondary has struggled against top-tier quarterbacks, as it surrendered 355 yards and four touchdowns to UCLA's Brett Hundley and 273 yards and two touchdowns to USC's Cody Kessler. Figure the Sun Devils to have some difficulties with the multi-threat Golson.

### EDGE: NOTRE DAME

### IRISH RUSHING

Sophomore running back Tarean Folston has received the lion's share of carries for the Irish after strong performances in his last three games. He's rushed for more than 120 yards in each of the past two games, becoming the first Irish running back to do so since Darius Walker did it in 2006. His emergence has relegated senior captain Cam McDaniel and fellow sophomore Greg Bryant to limited roles.

Folston and the Irish offensive line, which has also looked good the past three games, have to be excited to face Arizona State's rushing defense. The Sun Devils have allowed more than 150 yards in all but one game this season and yield an average of more than 180 rushing yards per game, 88th nationally. Folston and Golson alike should be able to find running room this Saturday.

### EDGE: NOTRE DAME

### IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

With the recent production from Folston and the offensive line, Irish offensive coordinator Mike Denbrock now has several more options at his disposal. The Irish have played four consecutive close games, but with the exception of the Stanford game, generating offense hasn't been an issue for the Irish.

Keith Patterson is in his first season as Sun Devils defensive coordinator, but he is familiar with Notre Dame — he was Tulsa's defensive coordinator when it upset the Irish in 2010 and Pitt's defensive coordinator during an ugly 15-12 Notre Dame win the following season. The Sun Devils have had some struggles replacing six starters from last season on defense but enter the game with some momentum, having held their last three Pac-12 opponents to a combined 40 points.

### EDGE: EVEN

### IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

After a strong start to the season, the Irish special teams have started to revert toward their usual mean. Notre Dame averages over seven yards per punt return and just under 20 yards per kickoff return. Even the normally reliable senior kicker Kyle Brindza missed two field goals last weekend.

But the Irish have potential for big plays against Arizona State's punt and kickoff return defenses, which rank among the worst in the nation. The Sun Devils have surrendered both kickoff and punt return touchdowns this season.

### EDGE: NOTRE DAME

### IRISH SCHEDULE (7-1)

Aug. 30 **Rice (W 48-17)**  
Sept. 6 **Michigan (W 31-0)**  
Sept. 13 **vs. Purdue (W 30-14)**  
Sept. 27 **vs. Syracuse (W 31-15)**  
Oct. 4 **Stanford (W 17-14)**  
Oct. 11 **North Carolina (W 50-43)**  
Oct. 18 **@ Florida State (L 31-27)**  
Nov. 1 **vs. Navy (W 49-39)**  
Nov. 8 **@ Arizona State**  
Nov. 15 **Northwestern**  
Nov. 22 **Louisville**  
Nov. 29 **@ USC**

# HEAD T

SUN DEVIL STADIUM

NO. 10 NOTRE DAME



(So.) <b>Will Fuller</b> <b>7</b> WR (So.) Torii Hunter Jr. 16	(Sr.) <b>Amir Carlisle</b> <b>3</b> WR (Jr.) C.J. Prosisie 20
(Sr.) <b>Cam McDaniel</b> <b>33</b> RB -OR- (So.) Tarean Folston 25 -OR- (So.) Greg Bryant 1	(Jr.) <b>Ronnie Stanley</b> <b>78</b> LT (So.) Hunter Bivin 70
(Sr.) <b>Everett Golson</b> <b>5</b> QB (So.) Malik Zaire 8	(Sr.) <b>Nick Martin</b> <b>72</b> LG (Sr.) Conor Hanratty 65
	(Sr.) <b>Matt Hegarty</b> <b>77</b> C (Jr.) Mark Harrell 75
	(So.) <b>Steve Elmer</b> <b>79</b> RG (So.) Colin McGovern 62
	(Gr.) <b>Christian Lombard</b> <b>74</b> RT (So.) Mike McGlinchey 68
	(Sr.) <b>Ben Koyack</b> <b>18</b> TE (So.) Durham Smythe 80 -OR- (Fr.) Tyler Luatua 13
	(Jr.) <b>Chris Brown</b> <b>2</b> WR (So.) Corey Robinson 88



(So.) <b>James Onwualu</b> <b>17</b> SLB (Jr.) John Turner 31	(So.) <b>Cole Luke</b> <b>36</b> LCB (So.) Devin Butler 12
(So.) <b>Max Redfield</b> <b>10</b> SS (Sr.) Matthias Farley 41	(Jr.) <b>Sheldon Day</b> <b>91</b> DE (Gr.) Justin Utupo 53
(Fr.) <b>Nyles Morgan</b> <b>5</b> MLB (So.) Michael Deeb 42	(Jr.) <b>Jarron Jones</b> <b>94</b> DT (Fr.) Daniel Cage 75
(Jr.) <b>Elijah Shumate</b> <b>22</b> FS (Fr.) Drue Tranquill 23	(So.) <b>Isaac Rochell</b> <b>90</b> DT (Fr.) Daniel Cage 75
	(Jr.) <b>Romeo Okwara</b> <b>45</b> DE (Fr.) Andrew Trumbetti 98
(So.) <b>Jaylon Smith</b> <b>9</b> WLB (Fr.) Greer Martini 48	
	(Gr.) <b>Cody Riggs</b> <b>2</b> RCB (Fr.) Nick Watkins 19



(Sr.) <b>Kyle Brindza</b> <b>27</b> PK (Fr.) Tyler Newsome 85	(Sr.) <b>Kyle Brindza</b> <b>27</b> KO (Fr.) Tyler Newsome 85
(Sr.) <b>Kyle Brindza</b> <b>27</b> P (Fr.) Tyler Newsome 31	(Sr.) <b>Amir Carlisle</b> <b>3</b> KR (Sr.) Cam McDaniel 33
(Gr.) <b>Cody Riggs</b> <b>2</b> PR -OR- (So.) Greg Bryant 1	(Jr.) <b>Scott Daly</b> <b>61</b> LS (Fr.) Hunter Smith 99



**Mike Monaco**  
Senior Sports Writer



**Brian Hartnett**  
Managing Editor



**Samantha Zuba**  
Assistant Managing Editor

Tempe looks perfectly primed for a Notre Dame slip-up. With Joe Schmidt lost for the season and an improved Arizona State defense, the Sun Devils could be favored at home in front a crowd looking to prove ESPN wrong for bypassing the spot for "College GameDay."

But ASU quarterback Taylor Kelly hasn't looked like himself in the last two games since returning from a broken foot while Everett Golson continues to roll. There will be offensive playmakers aplenty in the desert coupled with young, aggressive defenses.

It will be close, just like last year.

But Golson will carry the Irish to a marquee victory, an 8-1 record and, most importantly, a rise in the College Football Playoff rankings.

One thing is for sure about this Saturday's game — there will be a lot of points.

Both teams possess high-powered offenses led by dual-threat quarterbacks and quick receivers. And they both have aggressive defenses that at times have struggled to match such potent offenses.

Although the two teams look pretty close on paper, I have to give a slight edge to Notre Dame. Simply put, the Irish offense has been rolling the last few weeks, and the emergence of Tarean Folston is not what Arizona State's sub-par rush defense would like to see.

The Irish do lose quite a bit with Joe Schmidt out, but Nyles Morgan should make up for his lack of experience with his athleticism.

Notre Dame and Arizona State have a lot to lose or gain.

The Sun Devils leaped over the Irish this week to No. 9 in the College Football Playoff rankings with Notre Dame remaining at No. 10. Both teams have 7-1 records and cling to the fringes of the top four and a playoff berth.

On Saturday, both teams will be scrapping to keep those playoff hopes alive.

The Sun Devils have beaten Utah — No. 17 in the play-off rankings — but were clubbed by No. 18 UCLA, 62-27. Notre Dame has yet to defeat a team still in the rankings.

But the loss to Florida State proved the Irish could hang with anyone, and they will do so against Arizona State.

**FINAL SCORE** : Notre Dame 34, Arizona State 27

**FINAL SCORE** : Notre Dame 38, Arizona State 34

**FINAL SCORE** : Notre Dame 28, Arizona State 24



# 0 HEAD

3:30 P.M. ON ABC

NO. 9 ARIZONA STATE



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**FCB** **10** **Kweishi Brown** (Jr.)

13 Armand Perry (Fr.)

**WLB** **32** **Antonio Longino** (R-Jr.)

4 Dj Calhoun (Fr.)

**DE** **1** **Marcus Hardison** (Sr.)

6 Chans Cox (R-Fr.)

**FS** **38** **Jordan Simone** (R-Jr.)

18 James Johnson (R-Fr.)

**DT** **90** **Tashon Smallwood** (fr.)

94 Demetrius Cherry (R-Jr.)

**LB** **28** **Viliami Moeakiola** (R-So.)

4 Dj Calhoun (Fr.)

**NG** **92** **Jaxon Hood** (Jr.)

41 Viliami Latu (So.)

**DT** **97** **Edmond Boateng** (R-So.)

94 -OR- Demetrius Cherry (R-Jr.)

**BS** **3** **Damarious Randle** (Sr.)

5 Chad Adams (Fr.)

**SLB** **58** **Salamo Fiso** (R-So.)

44 Alani Latu (R-Fr.)

**BCB** **8** **Lloyd Carrington** (R-So.)

13 Armand Perry (Fr.)

**WR** **6** **Cameron Smith** (So.)

15 Ronald Lewis (R-Fr.)

**TE** **12** **De'Marieya Nelson** (R-Sr.)

83 -OR- Kody Kohl (R-So.)

**RT** **54** **Tyler Sulka** (R-Sr.)

75 William McGehee (R-Jr.)

**RB** **1** **Deantre Lewis** (R-Sr.)

9 -OR- Kalen Ballage (Fr.)

**RG** **73** **Vi Teofilo** (R-Jr.)

77 Stephon McCray (R-So.)

**QB** **10** **Taylor Kelly** (R-Sr.)

2 Mike Bercovici (R-Jr.)

**C** **50** **Nick Kelly** (Jr.)

77 Stephon McCray (R-So.)

**LG** **55** **Christian Westerman** (R-Jr.)

77 Stephon McCray (R-So.)

**TB** **8** **D.J. Foster** (Jr.)

4 Damario Richard (Fr.)

**LT** **74** **Jamil Douglas** (R-Sr.)

57 Evan Goodman (R-So.)

**WR** **81** **Gary Chambers** (R-Jr.)

89 Frederick Gammage (R-So.)

**WR** **21** **Jaelen Strong** (R-Jr.)

19 Ellis Jefferson (R-Fr.)

**KO** **25** **Alex Garoutte** (R-Sr.)

5 Zane Gonzalez (So.)

**KR** **7** **Kyle Middlebrooks** (R-Sr.)

1 Deantre Lewis (R-Sr.)

**LS** **66** **Donnie Shields** (Jr.)

63 -OR- Mitchell Fraboni (Fr.)

**PK** **5** **Zane Gonzalez** (So.)

25 Alex Garoutte (R-Sr.)

**P** **26** **Matt Haack** (So.)

27 Dylan Kegans (Jr.)

**PR** **7** **Kyle Middlebrooks** (R-Sr.)

3 -OR- Damarious Randall (Sr.)

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ASU

## SUN DEVILS PASSING

Arizona State has long had a potent passing attack, and this year is no different. Redshirt senior quarterback Taylor Kelly has had a distinguished career — he just passed Jake Plummer to move into third in Sun Devils history in passing touchdowns, and he threw for 362 yards against the Irish last year.

When Kelly missed three games earlier this season due to a foot injury, redshirt junior quarterback Mike Bercovici stepped in, and the offense didn't miss a beat as the signal-caller threw for nearly 1000 yards and eight touchdowns in his first two games.

The Sun Devils have several good receivers, but none has been more explosive than redshirt junior Jaelen Strong, who averages more than 100 yards per game and has eight touchdowns on the season.

Although the Irish secondary has been aggressive and forced turnovers all season, it will be hard-pressed to stop an experienced Arizona State passing attack.

## EDGE: ARIZONA STATE

## SUN DEVILS RUSHING

Arizona State's running game doesn't quite stack up to its passing attack, but it still generates over 190 yards per game. Dual-threat junior D.J. Foster has generated many of those yards, though his effectiveness in recent weeks has come mainly as a receiver.

Perhaps more concerning for Notre Dame is the fact that Kelly is a running threat himself. If sacks are removed from rushing statistics, Kelly has averaged nine yards per carry on the ground. The Irish allowed 132 rushing yards to North Carolina multi-dimensional quarterback Marquise Williams last month.

Still, Notre Dame's rush defense has been solid throughout the year. The Irish have allowed only two players to rush for at least 100 yards — Williams and Navy's Noah Copeland. The unit has struggled with running quarterbacks, but it has been strong enough against running backs to make this category a push overall.

## EDGE: EVEN

## SUN DEVILS OFFENSIVE COACHING

Under offensive coordinator Mike Norvell, Arizona State ranked 10th nationally in scoring offense last season. The Sun Devils have dropped to 36th in that category this season, but they also were without their experienced starting quarterback for three games.

Despite some struggles in the past three games, the Irish defense under new defensive coordinator Brian VanGorder has been fast and aggressive. Notre Dame will need VanGorder to prove his worth this week as it looks to replace senior linebacker Joe Schmidt, arguably the quarterback of the team's defense. How will defensive calls change with the talented but raw freshman Nyles Morgan at middle linebacker?

## EDGE: ARIZONA STATE

## SUN DEVILS SPECIAL TEAMS

Field-goal kicking has been one of the few bright spots for Arizona State's special teams this season. Sophomore kicker Zane Gonzalez has connected on 14 of 17 field goals this season, and he averages nearly 10 points per game, putting him seventh among kickers and 14th nationally.

Arizona State's kickoff return unit ranks above average nationally, but its punt return team has been abysmal, ranking 122nd in the nation.

Notre Dame's kickoff and punt coverage units are nowhere near as cringe-worthy as they were the past few seasons, though the potential to give up long returns still exists.

## EDGE: EVEN

## SUN DEVILS SCHEDULE (7-1)

Aug. 28 **Weber State** (W 45-14)  
Sept. 6 **@ New Mexico** (W 58-23)  
Sept. 13 **@ Colorado** (W 38-24)  
Sept. 25 **UCLA** (L 62-27)  
Oct. 4 **@ USC** (W 38-34)  
Oct. 18 **Stanford** (W 26-10)  
Oct. 25 **@ Washington** (W 24-10)  
Nov. 1 **Utah** (W 19-16 (OT))  
Nov. 8 **Notre Dame**  
Nov. 15 **@ Oregon State**  
Nov. 22 **Washington State**  
Nov. 28 **@ Arizona**



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Assistant Managing Editor



**Mary Green**

Sports Editor

The matchup against Arizona State is the biggest game remaining for the Irish. It is their last opportunity to prove they should be put in the mix for the College Football Playoff, especially after the playoff committee selected ASU to jump Notre Dame as the No. 9 team.

Both defenses are quick and aggressive, and dynamic quarterbacks lead both offenses. But Taylor Kelly has not put up his usual numbers, especially in the rushing category, since he returned from a three-game hiatus with a broken foot. Notre Dame looks to have the slight edge with Golson controlling things.

Ultimately, Notre Dame will triumph over the Sun Devils.

**FINAL SCORE** : Notre Dame 41, Arizona State 34

Three weeks ago, Notre Dame nearly upset the No. 2 team in the country. One week ago, the Irish lost a second-half lead to Navy in what should have been a blowout.

If one thing's for certain, it's that Notre Dame has played to the level of its opponents since its Oct. 4 matchup against Stanford.

Fortunately for the Irish, they face the nation's No. 9 team this week. Arizona State's Jaelen Strong creates a matchup nightmare for opponents with his 6-foot-3 frame, and the Sun Devils boast an above-average rushing game, led by D.J. Foster.

However, Notre Dame stepped up to go toe-to-toe with Florida State until the very end. Arizona State will be a challenge but not one big enough to stop the Irish.

**FINAL SCORE** : Notre Dame 34, Arizona State 28

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# Irish defense adjusts without LB Schmidt

By **SAMANTHA ZUBA**  
Assistant Managing Editor

With sidelined senior Joe Schmidt moving from linebacker to “coach on the field,” as Irish coach Brian Kelly has called him, the Notre Dame defense will have to adjust Saturday against Arizona State.

Schmidt fractured and dislocated his ankle last Saturday in the third quarter of Notre Dame’s

football.”

Defensive players from various position groups have upped their leadership in practice, junior defensive lineman Sheldon Day said.

“Everybody’s stepped up their communication a lot, especially coming from me and [sophomore linebacker] Jaylon [Smith] and then the safeties,” Day said. “Everybody’s making sure we understand what’s going on, the

***“I think everybody will pick up the slack there for the loss of Joe.”***

Brian Kelly  
Irish head coach

49-39 win over Navy. Before the injury, Schmidt was the leading tackler for the Irish with 65 and also had two interceptions.

In comes freshman linebacker Nyles Morgan from Crete, Illinois. But it won’t be a one-man effort to fill the hole left by one of the defense’s amiable leaders.

“I think everybody will pick up the slack there for the loss of Joe, and I think that we’ll make it so Nyles doesn’t have to do too much, but he’s going to have to do something as well,” Irish head coach Brian Kelly said at his Tuesday press conference. “He’s been here — he’s got enough

play call and make sure everybody’s on the same page.”

When asked how Smith has been able to act as a leader already as a sophomore, Day answered, laughing, “I guess it’s what Fort Wayne kids do, I don’t know.”

“He does a great job of communication and making sure everybody’s on the same page, so I commend Jaylon a lot,” Day added more seriously.

Day described how his own position on the defensive line gives him more opportunities to guide the rest of the defense in defensive coordinator Brian



ZACHARY LLORENS | The Observer

***Irish senior linebacker Joe Schmidt is out for the season with a fractured and dislocated left ankle suffered during Notre Dame’s 49-39 win over Navy on Saturday. Schmidt leads the Irish with 65 tackles.***

VanGorder’s scheme.

“Coach VanGorder’s big thing is always start off with viewing the field,” Day said. “So being a defensive lineman, I can view the

field and then get in my stance and kind of see what things can be and where the defense needs to line up, so I wouldn’t say it’s a greater role, but I definitely have to communicate more.”

Overall, despite the loss of Schmidt, Notre Dame’s defense won’t change too much, at least in terms of its scheme. In terms of position-by-position roles, not much will change, sophomore defensive lineman Isaac Rochell said.

“We have a next-man-in mentality, so it’s not like we’re changing our defense because Joe is hurt,” Rochell said. “I mean, obviously he was an integral part of our defense, but at the same time, we have to keep going.”

Even Schmidt’s middle linebacker position might not feel that different overall with Morgan receiving his first career start, Kelly said, although he and Schmidt play the position with a different style.

“I think [Morgan’s] physical ability is probably his biggest strength,” Kelly said. “He’s fast. He’s athletic, strong. ... Joe was able to put himself in the right

position and maybe does not have quickly as Nyles can get there because Nyles has got the physical ability.”

And since stepping into his new role, Morgan has started to add a vocal command of the defense to his skill set at practice, Rochell said.

“He’s definitely more vocal,” Rochell said. “Because when you go out with the twos, it’s a different feel than when you go out with the ones, and we kind of always looked to Joe, and so now we’re looking to Nyles. Even though he’s young, we don’t look at it like that.”

As for Schmidt, Kelly said he’s confident the senior will be an active presence.

“He’ll absolutely be working with us as soon as we get him out of surgery and get him up and around,” Kelly said. “He’ll be a coach on the field for us, there’s no question. He’ll be an asset for us and helping us and utilizing his great knowledge of the position to help Nyles.”

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MICHAEL YU | The Observer

***Irish sophomore linebacker Jaylon Smith, pictured here against Rice, said Notre Dame will rely on its “next-man-in” philosophy after senior linebacker Joe Schmidt suffered a season-ending ankle injury.***

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# Kelly, Strong power Sun Devils offense



KEVIN SONG | The Observer

Arizona State redshirt junior receiver Jaelen Strong races upfield during Notre Dame's 37-34 win over the Sun Devils last season at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

By ISAAC LORTON  
Assistant Managing Editor

Even with their starting quarterback sidelined for three games, the Sun Devils offense has produced.

Junior receiver Jaelen Strong had 30 catches for 323 yards and four touchdowns in Arizona State's games against UCLA, USC and Stanford, three of which came in the last-minute

38-34 comeback win over USC (6-3, 5-2 Pac-12) on Oct. 4. Meanwhile, senior quarterback Taylor Kelly was sidelined with a broken foot.

The two had established themselves last year as one of the most dangerous duos in the Pac-12 and some may argue college football. Kelly threw for 3,635 yards and 28 touchdowns while rushing for 852 yards and nine touchdowns. Strong was

Kelly's top target with 75 receptions for 1,122 yards and seven touchdowns.

This season began well for the pair as Strong had 19 catches for 266 yards and 2 touchdowns through the first three games before Kelly's injury.

While Kelly was hurt, however, Strong's production continued with junior quarterback Mike Bercovici stepping in.

Since Kelly returned Oct. 25th

against Washington, Strong and Kelly have not had huge games. Strong has amassed only eight catches for 132 yards and two touchdowns, but Irish head coach Brian Kelly said he is worried about Kelly returning for Arizona State (7-1, 5-1 Pac-12).

"Taylor Kelly back in the lineup really changes things [for ASU's offense], I think, in terms of his ability to run the football as well," Brian Kelly said. "[Taylor Kelly] is extremely elusive and looks for Jaelen Strong, who is as good as any wide receiver in the country."

Brian Kelly praised Strong's ability, comparing him to former Irish receiver Michael Floyd.

"[Strong] is athletic, fast, reminds me of Michael Floyd," Kelly said. "Big, athletic, strong hands, goes up and gets the football — just very dynamic."

Sun Devils head coach Todd Graham said both Taylor Kelly and Bercovici could run Arizona State's offense, but Kelly wins games and will continue as the starter.

"Each week, we're working both Taylor and Bercovici because they both bring great qualities to the field, but Taylor is our guy, and he's the only quarterback right now I believe in the Pac-12 who is undefeated," Graham said. "He's a winner; he's getting better every rep. ... He is not our team, he is a part of our team, so we just have to get prepared and get better."

Taylor Kelly has continued his winning ways after his return with a 24-10 win over Washington (6-3, 1-2 Pac-12) in Seattle and a 19-16 overtime victory against Utah at home. Graham said a win, regardless of the margin of victory, is how he has evaluated Kelly's return to the lineup.

"He's undefeated, and it's our job to transition him back and having missed six weeks, and he's coming back playing some really good people," Graham said.

Brian Kelly said with Taylor Kelly back at quarterback, Notre Dame's defense must prepare for a difficult task.

"We certainly have had players of [Strong's] caliber, but he's a unique blend of speed and size that I don't know that we've quite seen, but clearly we know what we need to do," Brian Kelly said. "We saw him last year, too, and he's an outstanding player."

The young Irish secondary will need to be aggressive, but only when the situation is appropriate, Kelly said.

"You know, [the corners] are going to have to fight," Kelly said. "They're going to have to fight for every possession against [Strong]. I think it's more about timing. If they have time to get the ball to him, it's going to be a battle every single time, there's no question. He's that good."

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KEVIN SONG | The Observer

Arizona State redshirt senior quarterback Taylor Kelly drops back to pass during Notre Dame's 37-34 win over the Sun Devils last season.



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