

IRISH INSIDER

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2015

SUPER HUMAN

CAN ANYONE STOP JAYLON SMITH?

THE **OBSERVER**

Photo Illustration by Erin Rice and Kat Robinson

ND VS **GT**

COMMENTARY

Time to find out the truth



Mary Green
Assistant Managing Editor

You've got to feel bad for Notre Dame, right?

The Irish closed out last season crippled by injury after injury on defense. This year, they've begun that exact same way, with the count now up to five starters done for 2015, and they still have 10 games left to play.

But these are the types of developments that must be making the executives and producers at Showtime, the home of the new series "A Series with Notre Dame Football," licking their chops.

I mean, this is the kind of stuff that's made for TV: The starting running back goes down with a torn ACL, and the replacement has to step up and hold down the run game in a road game not too far away from his hometown. The starting quarterback breaks his ankle, and his replacement leads an end-of-the-game effort capped by a touchdown bomb to the reliable, should-be All-American to retake the lead and keep the team's undefeated season alive.

And then Showtime went a step even further, with shots of Malik Zaire distraught in the locker room after finding out his season's over, then struggling with his new set of crutches to hobble onto the bus and plane.

It was an emotional and difficult scene for even the casual fan — let's not pretend that wasn't the desired effect from the show's producers. Between the behind-the-scenes footage, sound editing and voiceover, it was a challenge to not feel bad for Zaire and the team he can no longer help on the field.

But that's exactly what Brian Kelly doesn't want his team to do. They're in this to win a national championship, not wallow in self-pity.

"Everybody's got to deal with some adversity, and this is our end of it, and we'll be stronger for it," Kelly said Tuesday. "I just don't want to hear any excuses about it."

No matter what types of emotions seeing Zaire's response to his injury evokes, Irish fans don't want to hear any excuses from this team either. But they also want the truth, and this is the week they'll find out if the platitudes Kelly has been tossing around since the offseason are true, or if he's just saying them because, well, that's what head coaches are supposed to say.

Aug. 18: "This is, from an athletic standpoint and from a physical prowess standpoint, a deeper football team" — Kelly comparing his current team to the 2012 team.

When Kelly made this comparison during fall camp between this year's team and the one that advanced to the BCS Championship Game, it was as though he was tempting the football gods to prove him wrong or to at least test that statement.

If this truly is one of the deepest, if not the deepest, teams Kelly has coached in South Bend — and if it outranks a squad that fell a win short of a national title, then you'd think it has to be tops — the Irish should still have a fighting chance at nabbing a slot in the College Football Playoff.

But Notre Dame is also down five players they thought would still be on the field at this point, left alone in January. Saturday will be a start to providing answers as to whether the depth Kelly praised will be the factor that gets the Irish through this rough patch of luck or if it nonetheless falls short in the face of adversity.

Sept. 3: "He can go in there, and I would have absolutely no question about it, he can win for us. I want him to win a championship for us" — Kelly on

DeShone Kizer.

Kizer indeed won for the Irish last week, but he attempted all of 12 passes in just over a quarter of work. We'll find out this weekend if Kizer can win for Notre Dame or if he was graced with beginner's luck — and as reliable a receiver a first-time quarterback can ask for in Will Fuller — against Virginia.

Before Notre Dame can worry about if Kizer can win it a championship, it must first make sure he can win the rest of the season, starting with a true test this weekend.

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



MICHAEL YU | The Observer

Irish head coach Brian Kelly watches a play unfold during Notre Dame's season-opening victory against Texas on Sept. 5.

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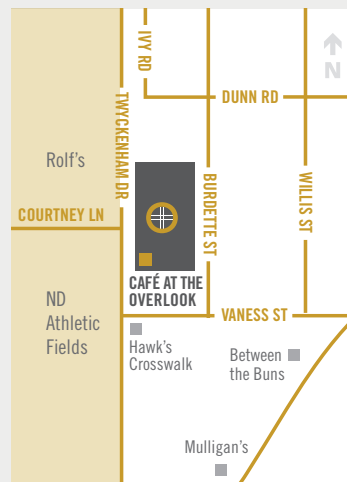
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'HE WANTS TO BE THE BEST IN THE WORLD'

By **ZACH KLONSINSKI**
Sports Editor

When Irish junior linebacker Jaylon Smith first walked through the doors of AWP Sports Training in his hometown of Fort Wayne, Indiana, Michael Ledo saw the same post-growth spurt clumsiness that's a part of life for all adolescents.

"Jaylon sophomore year in high school was extremely long and athletic but lacked some body control, especially when it came to footwork and change of direction," the owner and CEO of the training center said.

Still, Ledo said it didn't take him long to realize just what he had on his hands.

"I saw that Jaylon is a rare breed of an athlete immediately because of his commitment to growth over goals," Ledo said. "The enemy to being great is being good, and Jaylon is never satisfied with being good. He wants to be the best in the world."

It's a side of the story not often told about Jaylon Smith.

It's a bit cliché, but sometimes the most tragic stories in sports are about young athletes who possessed all of the physical abilities for greatness but lacked the drive, hunger

and desire that was also needed for them to become one of the greats. The ones that leave the world with 'what if' on the tip of its collective tongue.

Smith is far from one of those.

Much is made of his freakish athletic ability and the physical tools he possesses. Those alone are enough to get National Football League executives drooling over the prospect of him declaring for the league's draft this spring, where some way-too-early mocks have him listed as a potential top-10 pick come April.

And for good reason. At 6-foot-3 and 240 pounds, Smith can test even the best offensive linemen with a dangerous pass rush on first down, slip out and lock down a slot receiver on second and then complete the three-and-out by sticking an open-field tackle short of the sticks on third down.

Just ask Tyrone Swoopes, who ended up on the wrong side of such a third-down play just two weeks ago. The 6-foot-4, 244-pound Texas quarterback was stopped dead in his tracks by Smith despite gathering a full head of steam out of the backfield.

"Some of the plays, he may

be in the wrong spot, but all of a sudden he takes off for the sideline and covers so much ground, it's like, you think he has the speed of a safety, but he's 240 pounds," fellow junior linebacker James Onwualu said of Smith. "So I think some of those natural gifted plays he has, is something for me to be like, 'Wow, that's unbelievable.' He's an unbelievable athlete. Athlete to athlete, I can really respect that."

"Short answer, I haven't coached a player like him before, period," Irish head coach Brian Kelly said Sept. 8. "He can line up with his hand on the ground. He can cover the inside receiver. He can play in the box. He can tackle in open space. There's not much he can't do. He's a rare, rare defensive player. It's just fun watching him play."

Onwualu said he still remembers the first time he met Smith at a football camp in Michigan.

"We were out on the grass, and he was wearing his Notre Dame hat, and I was already committed so I just went right up to him and said 'Hi' to him, and I didn't even know him," Onwualu said. "I was a receiver, so I wasn't looking at, like, who was the best linebacker in the country, so before you know it we were talking."

Then, Onwualu said, he kept noticing Smith — everywhere.

"He was playing every position," Onwualu said. "I wish I remember the name of the camp because there's probably some sick footage of him playing running back, then going to play cornerback, then linebacker."

Yet for all his athletic ability, Smith possesses an even greater set of assets: his drive, desire and mental acuity, Ledo said.

"Jaylon Smith's greatest attribute is his mind and heart. As great as an athlete he is, we have seen others with the same ability before him and after. But we will be hard pressed to see others the combination of his athletic ability, influence, intelligence and heart," Ledo said.

It is a distinctive quality about Smith, one that allowed him to dominate the high school gridiron as a part of Bishop Luers High School's

four consecutive state championships at Indiana's Class 2A level. Ledo said everyone who works with Smith on a day-to-day basis discovers just how well he is able to take new information and integrate it into his play.

"Jaylon was blessed with amazing coaching at Bishop Luers, and coach [Matt] Millhouse was an amazing defensive coordinator that prepared Jaylon mentally for college schemes," Ledo said. "I totally agree with them all; Jaylon has what I would call an extremely high learning agility. He has a gift to learn and apply what he learned extremely fast."

Onwualu and Smith have spent much of their Notre Dame careers together, being part of the same class and position group. They watch film, lift and even jam out together in the locker room pre- and post-practice, so Onwualu has had a front row seat to Smith's evolution over his time on campus. He even credited Smith as a large factor in his own development for the Irish.

"I lift with him, and it's part of the reason for my gains," Onwualu said. "We lift hard together, just like he is on the field. We get in there, and we do our work."

"He just gets after it."

For his part, Smith said his development over his time in South Bend in the mental aspects of the game has increased "tremendously."

"Just my knowledge of the game and understanding different concepts and understanding why I'm supposed to do something," Smith said when asked where his game has improved the most. "If I do this, where's my teammate going to be? And just the overall understanding of defense in the objective is something that I've improved upon tremendously here."

Onwualu said this knowledge and understanding comes from Smith's commitment to and passion for the game of football.

"Mentally, he just straight up loves the game," Onwualu said. "He wants to continue to study it. He pushes himself to continue to learn the game, and he works hard. That's why he's so smart."

The devotion and work ethic described by Onwualu was a large factor in Smith being named a captain for the 2015 season. Kelly said after the announcement it was not only because Smith is the best player on the defense but also because of the impact he has in all facets of the game, both on and off the field.

Smith said he credits his drive and approach to the game to his family and early mentors, like Ledo and Millhouse.

"I think it comes from within. It comes from how I was raised and just the overall mindset of wanting to be something," Smith said. "It's kind of inexplicable. I've always been taught just be a humble guy, and if you work at something, you'll get it."

"And I just want to go get it."

"He's one of the best competitors I've ever met," Onwualu said. "From day one he's stayed consistent, and he's still one of those guys that you can count on to compete every play."

Through it all, Smith said he knows he's lucky to be where he is today. He said his humility guides the mentality with which he approaches everything, especially hard workouts and tedious film sessions.

"Just lock in. This game, that's sports, using it as a platform that's bigger than me," Smith said. "It's not about my success or anything, like, that I do this for. There's definitely a bigger reason why I'm blessed to be on this platform."

That said, a little success on the way probably doesn't hurt anything, especially with the top-15 matchup against Georgia Tech on Saturday looming and questions about Notre Dame's legitimacy as a playoff contender thickening the air around the program.

"Every game is exciting for me," Smith said. "You get an opportunity to step out there, but it's going to be a great environment being at home for the second time this season. We're looking forward to it."

"It definitely elevates the hype of the game, but at the end of the day it's another game. I'm pumped for every game."

Contact Zach Klonsinski at zklonsin@nd.edu

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RECRUITING

Irish look to build East Coast efforts



Courtesy of Blue and Gold Illustrated, Rivals.com

Class of 2016 receiver Demetris Robertson lines up to grab a pass at the Rivals100 Five-Star Challenge in June in Baltimore.

By ALEX CARSON
Associate Sports Editor

While Notre Dame has not added a new commit for either the class of 2016 or 2017 in a while, that may soon change, as several high-profile recruits could be set to make decisions in the next couple weeks, Irish recruiting analyst Andrew Ivins said.

"It's wait and see right now," Ivins, who covers Irish recruiting for Blue and Gold Illustrated, said. "Some of the guys who visited for the Texas game will make their decision in the next couple weeks."

Among the crop of visitors for the Texas opener was receiver Demetris Robertson, a five-star former Alabama commit who took an official visit to Notre Dame two weeks ago.

And while there won't be a slew of visitors on campus this weekend for the Irish, it's still a chance to impress their lone official visitor.

"They're going to host one official visitor this week for the Georgia Tech game, linebacker Aaron Hansford," Ivins said. "He's a 6-foot-2, 210-pound undersized kid."

The Washington, D.C. native sits amongst the top 15 outside linebackers and top 150 overall players in Rivals.com's Rivals250, and Ivins said the four-star recruit and Notre Dame could be a good match, calling him a "good

fit."

While the linebacker position wasn't initially one of need for the Irish in this class, recent developments have meant Notre Dame could be looking for an additional recruit this year at the position; Sophomore Kolin Hill transferred to Texas Tech, while freshman Nile Sykes left for Indiana before playing a snap for Notre Dame.

If junior Jaylon Smith leaves for the NFL Draft at season's end, Ivins said the Irish would only have six linebackers on scholarship.

It all comes together to mean Hansford's visit becomes more important than it otherwise would have been for the Irish staff.

"Originally, we thought they were only going to take one or two linebackers, now I think it's definitely two or three for sure," Ivins said. "Aaron is the first linebacker to take an official visit, and that's what I think makes this weekend's visit extremely important, in terms of having one guy on campus."

"This is a guy who seems like a fit for Notre Dame; I always use that, it sounds so cliché, but based on everything that he's looking for in a school ... this is a guy that they definitely need to make an impression on this weekend while he's on campus."

see RECRUITING PAGE 5

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Recruiting

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Last Thursday, Brian Kelly discussed Notre Dame's deal with the ACC that sees the Irish play five games each year against teams from the conference, noting it has increased the school's exposure on the East Coast.

"There's clearly a group of student-athletes now that pay more attention to Notre Dame because of that

footprint," the Irish head coach said.

Kelly was quick to note Notre Dame had always been recruiting nationally and still is, but said the school now has "more notoriety" in the area.

"It's opened up the recruiting opportunities for us," Kelly said. "But I still think it's national recruiting for us."

It came at the start of a stretch in which the Irish played three games of four

against ACC opposition, and Ivins said while it's not paramount, the added attention paid to the program on the East Coast helps.

"It's difficult to point to one thing and be like, 'Yeah, we played a game there, so we're recruiting well,' but that said, Notre Dame went to Virginia for the first time ever, and they already have a kid committed from Virginia in [safety] Jalon Elliot," Ivins said. "Obviously, when you're in the mid-Atlantic, that exposure helps."

With this weekend's game against Georgia Tech and an upcoming series with Georgia, including a trip to Athens, Georgia, in 2019, it's an opportunity to change Notre Dame's struggles recruiting in the state.

"They continue to try to recruit Georgia, and that's really been not an Achilles heel, but it's been really hard to crack that area," Ivins said. "They got Demetris Robertson, the number one player from Georgia, to take an official visit."

And while the Irish can't "host" recruits when they play at Virginia or Clemson, having that East Coast presence helps on the recruiting trail, Ivins said.

"It helps just being on the television, being in the newspaper, just building the brand," he said.

Contact Alex Carson at acarson1@nd.edu

CURRENT NOTRE DAME COMMITS

CLASS OF 2016:

IAN BOOK
— QB —
EL DORADO HILLS, CALIF.

PARKER BOUDREAU
— OL —
ORLANDO, FLA.

CHASE CLAYPOOL
— WR —
ABBOTSFORD, B.C.

LIAM EICHENBERG
— OL —
CLEVELAND

JALEN ELLIOTT
— S —
CHESTERFIELD, VA.

JAMIR JONES
— LB —
ROCHESTER, N.Y.

TONY JONES
— RB —
BRADENTON, FLA.

TOMMY KRAEMER
— OL —
CINCINNATI

JULIAN LOVE
— CB —
LAGRANGE PARK, ILL.

ADETOKUNBO OGUNDEJI
— DL —
WALLED LAKE, MICH.

JULIAN OKWARA
— DL —
CHARLOTTE, N.C.

SPENCER PERRY
— S —
BRADENTON, FLA.

JOHN SHANNON
— LS —
WILMETTE, ILL.

KEVIN STEPHERSON
— WR —
JACKSONVILLE, FLA.

CLASS OF 2017:

DILLAN GIBBONS
— OL —
ST. PETERSBURG, FLA.

JOSHUA LUGG
— OL —
WEXFORD, PA.

BROCK WRIGHT
— TE —
CYPRESS, TEXAS

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YELLOW JACKETS PASSING

With Georgia Tech relying on their spread option offense, redshirt junior quarterback Justin Thomas doesn't drop back to pass very often. When he does, though, he is impressive. Last season Thomas led a Yellow Jacket aerial attack that ranked first in the NCAA in pass efficiency. This season, Thomas is 10-of-13 for 151 yards and three touchdowns, which would rank first again if he had enough attempts.

Thomas's receivers, however, are unproven, as his top four targets from last season are gone. This year, Michael Summers leads Georgia Tech with just 64 yards on four receptions.

On the other side of the ball, Notre Dame's secondary struggled mightily against Virginia. KeiVarae Russell, Max Redfield and Cole Luke all got beat on deep balls, which could happen again with the constant threat of play action.

EDGE: GEORGIA TECH

YELLOW JACKETS RUSHING

Last season, Georgia Tech rushed for 342.1 yards per game, good for second in the country. So far this season, Tech is averaging 457.5 rushing yards per game. Granted, that was against Alcorn State and Tulane, but the numbers still speak for themselves.

Minus quarterback Justin Thomas, who ran for 1,086 yards a season ago, the Yellow Jackets lost their top four backs from 2014. In their spread option system, however, it is just plug-and-play with running backs. B-back Patrick Skov leads the way in terms of touches, carrying the ball 23 times for 122 yards and four touchdowns so far. Fellow B-back Marcus Marshall has totalled 221 yards on the ground, averaging 15.8 yards per attempt. Outside of that duo, Tech relies on Thomas (101 yards, two touchdowns) and top-returner Broderick Snoddy (86 yards), among others.

The Notre Dame front seven, for their part, has been stout against the run so far this season, holding opponents to 93.5 yards per game on the ground. The option is obviously a different animal, but Irish assistant Bob Elliott has been prepping for it all season. Look for a back-and-forth battle in the trenches.

EDGE: EVEN

YELLOW JACKETS OFFENSIVE COACHING

Although running the option play after play

may seem mundane, Georgia Tech coach Paul Johnson finds a way to get creative.

The Georgia Tech football Twitter handle seems to agree, as it recently mentioned that Tech had two of the ACC's top five trick plays in 2014, according to the ACC Digital Network. Johnson has always added a little ingenuity to his offense, so he will certainly have a few tricks up his sleeve against the Irish defense.

Brian VanGorder will be tasked with stopping the option, something he couldn't do last year when Navy put up 39 points and gained 336 yards on the ground. His 4-3 base defense has always been blitz heavy, but he'll have to alter his philosophy against a potent Tech rushing attack. If Navy can pound the football and average 5.2 yards per carry, look for a more talented Tech team to be even better.

EDGE: GEORGIA TECH

YELLOW JACKETS SPECIAL TEAMS

With Georgia Tech blowing out its first two opponents, it did not attempt a field goal in either game. Kicker Harrison Butker was, however, perfect on extra points during the first two games at 18-for-18. The last two seasons Butker has been the main kicker and gone a combined 21-for-32.

Punter Ryan Rodwell has been less than stellar, averaging 40.7 yards on three attempts.

In the return game, Jamal Golden is the starter at both positions. Golden hasn't done much returning kickoffs but has been impressive returning punts, where he has three returns for 89 yards with a long of 44 yards.

Between a kicker that hasn't seen the field in important situations and a returner that has the ability to break one, this one is a toss-up.

EDGE: EVEN

YELLOW JACKETS SCHEDULE (2-0)

Sept. 3 **Alcorn State (W 69-6)**
 Sept. 12 **Tulane (W 65-10)**
 Sept. 19 **@ Notre Dame**
 Sept. 26 **@ Duke**
 Oct. 3 **North Carolina**
 Oct. 10 **@ Clemson**
 Oct. 17 **Pittsburgh**
 Oct. 24 **Florida State**
 Oct. 31 **@ Virginia**
 Nov. 12 **Virginia Tech**
 Nov. 21 **@ Miami**
 Nov. 28 **Georgia**

HEAD T

NOTRE DAME STADIUM

NO. 14 GEORGIA TECH



(r-Sr.) **Broderick Snoddy** ²² AB
 (r-Fr.) Qua Searcy 1

(Sr.) **Patrick Skov** ⁷ BB
 (Fr.) Marcus Marshall 34

(r-Jr.) **Justin Thomas** ⁵ QB
 (r-Fr.) Matthew Jordan 11

(r-Jr.) **Isiah Willis** ³ AB
 (Fr.) TaQuon Marshall 16

(r-So.) **Ricky Jeune** ² WR
 (Fr.) Brad Stewart 83

(r-Sr.) **Bryan Chamberlain** ⁵³ LT
 (Fr.) Will Bryan 70

(Sr.) **Trey Braun** ⁷⁸ LG
 (r-Fr.) Jack Whitley 64

(r-Jr.) **Freddie Burden** ⁵⁸ C
 (So.) Andrew Marshall 50

(r-So.) **Shamire Devine** ⁷¹ RG
 (r-Fr.) Trey Klock 65

(r-Sr.) **Errin Joe** ⁷⁵ RT
 (r-So.) Eason Fromayan 79

(r-Jr.) **Micheal Summers** ⁸⁴ WR
 (r-So.) Antonio Messick 86



(r-Sr.) **Chris Milton** ⁶ LCB
 (So.) Lance Austin 17

(Jr.) **Chase Alford** ⁴⁸ SLB
 (Fr.) David Curry 39

(r-Sr.) **Jamal Golden** ⁴ SS
 (So.) Shaun Kagawa 44

(So.) **KeShun Freeman** ⁴² DE
 (So.) Antonio Simmons 93

(r-Sr.) **Tyler Marcordes** ³⁵ MLB
 (r-Jr.) Beau Hankins 33

(Sr.) **Adam Gotsis** ⁹⁶ DT
 (r-Fr.) Francis Kallon 92

(r-Sr.) **Demond Smith** ¹² FS
 (Fr.) A.J. Gray 15

(r-Sr.) **Jabari Hunt** ³² NT
 (Fr.) Brentavious Glanton 97

(r-Jr.) **Patrick Gamble** ⁹¹ DE
 (R-Jr.) Rod Rook-Chungong 41

(Jr.) **P.J. Davis** ⁴⁰ WLB
 (r-Sr.) Domonique Noble 23

(Sr.) **D.J. White** ²⁸ RCB
 (So.) Step Durham 8



(Jr.) **Harrison Butker** ⁸⁷ PK
 (Fr.) Shaun Davis 80

(r-Jr.) **Ryan Rodwell** ⁸⁵ H

(r-Jr.) **Ryan Rodwell** ⁸⁵ P
 (Fr.) Shaun Davis 80

(r-Sr.) **Jamal Golden** ⁴ KR
 (r-Fr.) Qua Searcy 1

(r-Sr.) **Jamal Golden** ⁴ PR

(r-Sr.) **Sean Tobin** ⁵⁵ LS



Greg Hadley
 Editor-in-Chief



Mary Green
 Assistant Managing Editor



Zach Klonsinski
 Sports Editor

This is it for the Irish. A win here against a top-15 opponent means their playoff hopes extend beyond Malik Zaire. A loss at home once more to a triple-option offense ends the run before it begins and could foreshadow another 8-5 season for Brian Kelly.

Georgia Tech will score plenty Saturday. The Yellow Jackets won't put up 60 points as they did in their first two games, but the Irish defense will tire at some point against one of the nation's most challenging, explosive offenses.

What the game will come down to is DeShone Kizer and the Notre Dame offense. From the very first series, the Irish will need to put points of the board on practically every drive. Expect C.J. Prosise to take on an expanded role and keep Notre Dame alive through sheer force of will.

Brian Kelly indicated Notre Dame's experience defending the triple option against Navy will help it against Georgia Tech, or at least he said some experience is better than none at all.

That might be true, but when the Irish play Navy, they aren't lining up against a 366-lb. offensive lineman or receivers taken in the first rounds of the NFL Draft. Notre Dame also doesn't normally bring a quarterback starting his first career game into the matchup. DeShone Kizer might have a week of practicing with the first team under his belt, but he will have to outscore a Georgia Tech offense that's averaged 55.7 points over its last 10 games.

That will be too tough a task for both the Irish defense and their quarterback — you can't throw bombs to Will Fuller on every play.

It's hard to believe how much of a U-turn this season's expectations have already taken in the minds of many. DeShone Kizer isn't quite Malik Zaire, but he does have tools of his own.

Of course, if the defense has another day like it did against the Cavaliers, it might not matter how well Kizer plays. The triple-option offense never ceases to impress when it's well-executed.

However, the Irish defense will play insulted against the Yellow Jackets after its performance last week and the added pressure it will be under this week. Look for the rest of the team to come out extra determined, too.

In his first game as a starter, Kizer and the Irish reaffirm themselves as having at least an outside chance at a playoff spot.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 30, Georgia Tech 28

FINAL SCORE: Georgia Tech 31, Notre Dame 24

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 27, Georgia Tech 17

0 HEAD

3:30 P.M. ON NBC

NO. 8 NOTRE DAME



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RCB **6** KeiVarae Russell (Sr.)
12 Devin Butler (Jr.)

WLB **9** Jaylon Smith (Jr.)
4 Te'von Coney (Fr.)

DE **45** Romeo Okwara (Sr.)
98 Andrew Trumbetti (So.)

DT **91** Sheldon Day (Sr.)
93 Jay Hayes (So.)

DT **75** Daniel Cage (So.)
99 Jerry Tillery (Fr.)

DE **90** Isaac Rochell (Jr.)
55 Jonathan Bonner (So.)

SLB **17** James Onwualu (Jr.)
48 Greer Martini (So.)

LCB **36** Cole Luke (Jr.)
24 Nick Coleman (Fr.)

WR **7** Will Fuller (Jr.)
86 Equanimeous St. Brown (Fr.)

TE **13** Tyler Luatua (So.)
10 Alizé Jones (Fr.)

RT **68** Mike McGlinchey (Jr.)
75 Mark Harrell (Sr.)

RG **79** Steve Elmer (Jr.)
62 Colin McGovern (Jr.)

C **72** Nick Martin (Gr.)
53 Sam Mustipher (So.)

LG **56** Quentin Nelson (So.)
71 Alex Bars (So.)

LT **78** Ronnie Stanley (Sr.)
70 Hunter Bivin (Jr.)

WR **3** Amir Carlisle (Gr.)
16 Torii Hunter Jr. (Jr.)

WR **2** Chris Brown (Sr.)
88 Corey Robinson (Jr.)

H **14** DeShone Kizer (So.)
4 Montgomery VanGorder (So.)

KR **3** Amir Carlisle (Gr.)
9 C.J. Sanders (Fr.)

LS **61** Scott Daly (Sr.)
99 Hunter Smith (Sr.)

PK **19** Justin Yoon (Fr.)
43 John Cherson (Jr.)

P **85** Tyler Newsome (So.)
42 Jeff Riney (Fr.)

PR **9** C.J. Sanders (Fr.)
7 Will Fuller (Jr.)

RB **20** C.J. Prosise (Sr.)
33 Josh Adams (Fr.)

QB **14** DeShone Kizer (So.)
12 Brandon Wimbush (Fr.)



IRISH PASSING

This might be the most intriguing part of the game, considering sophomore quarterback DeShone Kizer is making his first start.

Kizer struggled with accuracy early when he came on in relief against Virginia, but stepped up on the final drive, making a gutsy 39-yard pass to receiver Will Fuller that gave Notre Dame the win.

Brian Kelly will have had an entire week to make a plan for Kizer, and Kizer will have received invaluable first team reps. On the other hand, the Georgia Tech defense will have had an entire week to prepare for Kizer and figure out how to fluster the young quarterback.

Kizer has a plethora of weapons at his disposal, although he will miss starting tight end Durham Smythe, out for the season with knee and shoulder injuries. The line in front of Kizer has been stellar in its own right, not allowing a sack while keeping pressure off the quarterback. Kizer should be able to simply get the ball in his receivers' hands and let them make plays, but playing his first game against a ranked foe with a veteran secondary will be very challenging.

EDGE: GEORGIA TECH

IRISH RUSHING

The Irish are without their top five leading rushers from last season, yet they've looked just fine on the ground so far in 2015.

Senior C.J. Prosise in particular has been fantastic, carrying the load while running for 253 yards and a touchdown. Freshman Josh Adams will back up Prosise, although he didn't play much against Virginia. Adams had an impressive debut against Texas, scoring two touchdowns on five carries.

The most interesting aspect of the Notre Dame rushing attack will be quarterback DeShone Kizer. Malik Zaire was more of a natural runner and someone Kelly said could be utilized 10 times per game. Kizer is a bigger body but can still move the chains with his feet when asked.

Tech doesn't have anyone with more than eight tackles on defense, but that can be attributed to their blowout wins. Defensive tackle Adam Gotsis leads a solid front, but they'll have their hands full with Prosise.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

It will be very interesting to see how Kelly adapts, creating a gameplan that utilizes Kizer's strengths. Kelly said after the Virginia win that Kizer is very deep into the Irish offensive playbook. Furthermore, each quarterback has their top 10 running and passing plays that they are comfortable with.

With roughly two quarters of experience, including a game-winning drive, Kizer is not necessarily being thrown into the fire. Still, the Irish will keep it simple for his first start and not make him win the game all by himself.

Because of the change in quarterback and the repercussions of that, look for Georgia Tech to have the edge here.

EDGE: GEORGIA TECH

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

Although it didn't even involve the kicker, the Notre Dame special teams unit made headlines last weekend with its fake field goal touchdown in the first quarter.

That won't be common week-to-week; instead, freshman kicker Justin Yoon will look to add to his 3-for-5 start. Yoon has a strong leg, but missed a 34-yarder last week.

Punter Tyler Newsome was a bright spot for the Irish last week, averaging 55.8 yards per punt. Kelly was pleased with his performance but wants Newsome to focus on his coffin corner kicks and preventing touchbacks.

On the return end, Amir Carlisle hasn't seen success yet, averaging just 15 yards per return. Punt returner C.J. Sanders has made some questionable decisions, but also has showed flashes of brilliance, including a 30-yard return against Virginia.

EDGE: EVEN

IRISH SCHEDULE (2-0)

Sept. 5 **Texas (W 38-3)**
Sept. 12 **@ Virginia (W 34-27)**
Sept. 19 **Georgia Tech**
Sept. 26 **Massachusetts**
Oct. 3 **@ Clemson**
Oct. 10 **Navy**
Oct. 17 **USC**
Oct. 31 **@ Temple**
Nov. 7 **@ Pittsburgh**
Nov. 14 **Wake Forest**
Nov. 21 **vs. Boston College**
Nov. 28 **@ Stanford**



Alex Carson
Associate Sports Editor



Brian Plamondon
Sports Writer

We've seen the troubles Notre Dame has had stopping Navy's triple-option offense over the last two years, and Georgia Tech runs the system better and more efficiently than the Midshipmen do. They suffocate time of possession and pose problem after problem for defenses with their unique scheme.

If the defense struggles, it means the game will be put on the shoulders of the offense, and most specifically the offensive line, a unit that struggled mightily on third down a week ago. DeShone Kizer will carry confidence into this affair after the game-winning drive at Virginia, but at the end of the day, this game comes down to Notre Dame's ability to stop the triple option. And until I see it with my eyes, I can't be convinced they'll do it.

FINAL SCORE: Georgia Tech 45, Notre Dame 27

Last week, I wasn't wrong about Notre Dame's talent or Virginia's mediocrity — I simply forgot to factor in how lousy the Irish are on the road lately, no matter who they are playing.

This week at home should be a different story. Even with a young quarterback, the Irish should still find a way to put points on the board. With weapons like Will Fuller and C.J. Prosise, it's hard not to.

The defense will be a different story. Although I expect Notre Dame to play smarter than last week, their troubles against the run all stemmed from plays outside the tackles — a common feature of the spread option.

The Irish will hang tough at Notre Dame Stadium down four starters, but I don't see Kizer with late heroics this time.

FINAL SCORE: Georgia Tech 27, Notre Dame 24

For in-game updates and stats from the press box Saturday, follow us on Twitter at @ObserverSports



Kelly tweaks game plan for Kizer's first start

By **BRIAN PLAMONDON**
Sports Writer

Notre Dame will trot out its third starting quarterback in five games Saturday. Unlike in the past, though, when head coach Brian Kelly switched signal callers due to subpar performances, this time it is out of necessity.

Everett Golson is in Tallahassee, Florida, Malik Zaire is on the sidelines with a broken ankle, and the fate of Notre Dame's season rests in the hands of sophomore DeShone Kizer, he of 13 pass attempts to his name. At 6-foot-4 inches and 230 pounds, Kizer is a far different player than the two quarterbacks that came before him.

As a result, the Irish game plan Saturday will be a little different from how it operated against Texas and Virginia, although Kelly is wary of deviating too much.

"I think he's a little bit different in that he sees the field very well, he's got escape-ability," Kelly said during his Sunday teleconference. "I just don't see him as elusive of a runner ... so we'll do some things a little bit differently with him than we did with Malik. But I also think he has some other skill sets that we can definitely go to that will help our offense."

Despite his different skill set, Kizer said he is glad there hasn't been a philosophical change regarding how the offense will operate.

"We're running the same offense we've always run," Kizer said. "We're game planning the same way I've always seen us

game plan, and we're running the same offense that we've obviously run for the last couple years now."

Although Kelly said the offense might be paired down somewhat in order to make Kizer comfortable, he noted the quarterback already has mastery over most of the playbook. Furthermore, Kizer will be helped along by a veteran crop of receivers, led by junior Will Fuller.

"[We've played] to the strengths of what we have around the quarterback," Kelly said in reference to his success with young quarterbacks in the past. "... DeShone is surrounded with some good players. We saw that on Saturday. He managed the game very well for us."

While Kizer was disappointed to be relegated to the third team by the presence of Everett Golson this spring, he was able to gain invaluable experience with his receivers over the past couple of months after Golson bolted for Florida State.

"Over the summer I was able to get out and throw to all the guys as much as I possibly [could], and I got quite a few reps in," Kizer said. "When it came to seven-on-sevens, I was working with the ones and twos rather than working with the incoming freshmen I was working with last year. With that preparation and all the reps, it allowed me to gain a little more confidence in my game. Obviously that kind of carried into the fall, and that confidence is now at its best going into week three."

Kizer's confidence was on display last Saturday, as he fearlessly



CAITLYN JORDAN | The Observer

Sophomore quarterback DeShone Kizer steps back and looks for an open receiver in the fourth quarter of Notre Dame's come-from-behind, 34-27 victory over Virginia on Saturday at Scott Stadium.

led the Irish down the field in the final 1:54 against Virginia. Although his demeanor is certainly different from Zaire, who wears his emotions on his sleeve, Kizer should be just fine guiding the Irish offense, Kelly said.

"He's got excellent leadership skills," Kelly said. "He's respected by his teammates, and he can go in there, he's very confident. He just has a confident air about him and he believes he can go in there and win."

According to Kizer, the first drive of the game against Georgia Tech will be key in keeping up his confidence.

"It's going to be pretty big for me and gaining the trust and becoming comfortable with my team and rolling down there," Kizer said.

Getting comfortable for Kizer might mean upping the tempo early against Georgia Tech. That was when he was most successful against Virginia, and it is something Kizer wouldn't mind doing to get into a rhythm.

"I'd like to consider the two-minute situations are times where I can kind of settle in," Kizer said. "When you were in two minutes, only focus is getting the next yard."

Whether Kizer is quarterbacking an up-tempo offense or one

that settles down and works the running game, he knows it will be one tailored to his game and that he'll be prepared.

"I believe that within the first couple of days of preparation for [Georgia Tech] I have a good grasp of what their defense likes to do, and hopefully we can continue to improve in that preparation and prepare ourselves as much as we possibly can," Kizer said. "And by Saturday I think I'll be ready for whatever they can throw at me."

Contact Brian Plamondon at bplamond@nd.edu



CAITLYN JORDAN | The Observer

Sophomore quarterback DeShone Kizer scrambles to evade Virginia defenders during the Irish win over the Cavaliers last Saturday.

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CAITLYN JORDAN | The Observer

Irish senior running back C.J. Prosise evades the grasp of a Virginia defender to score a touchdown during last week's 34-27 victory.



CAITLYN JORDAN | The Observer

Junior linebacker Jaylon Smith, left, and sophomore defensive lineman Daniel Cage bring down running back Taquan Mizzell.



CAITLYN JORDAN | The Observer

C.J. Prosise finds an opening in the Cavaliers defense during Notre Dame's 34-27 win over Virginia on Saturday at Scott Stadium.

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Fall 2015



"Thank God for the saints whose feast days come around and remind us that we too are called to be saints."

- Dorothy Day

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Mary Catherine Hilker, O.P., Professor of Systematic Theology, Notre Dame

September 19
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Andrews Auditorium
Lower Level, Geddes Hall



Johnson's triple option presents challenge to ND



Courtesy of John Nakano | The Technique

Georgia Tech redshirt junior quarterback Justin Thomas scrambles to his right during the Yellow Jackets' 65-10 victory over Tulane on Saturday at Bobby Dodd Stadium in Atlanta. Thomas picked up 71 rushing yards and two touchdowns along with 97 passing yards and two more scores.

By **GREG HADLEY**
Editor-in-Chief

The most prolific offense in the country.

That's how Irish head coach Brian Kelly described Georgia Tech in Wednesday's ACC teleconference, and the numbers certainly back him up on that point. Through two games, the No. 14 Yellow Jackets have amassed 134 points and 915 rushing yards on 8.5 yards per attempt. All of those statistics rank among the top two in the NCAA.

Granted, those games came against Alcorn State and Tulane, but Kelly's respect for Georgia Tech runs deeper than just this season.

Yellow Jackets head coach Paul Johnson's patented triple-option offense has been giving Notre Dame trouble for more than a decade now, going back to his time at Navy from 2002 to 2007.

Under his guidance, the Midshipmen defeated the Irish for the first time in 44 years in 2007, and Navy continues to use that style of offense even after he departed for Georgia Tech. In the past two seasons, Navy has played Kelly and Notre Dame close and racked up more than 330 yards rushing each time.

Meanwhile, the Yellow Jackets have flourished under Johnson's system, advancing to the Orange Bowl twice in six years and ending last season ranked eighth in the final AP poll.

They picked up in 2015 right where they left off, exploding out of the gate with two quick blowouts. Redshirt junior quarterback Justin Thomas has collected two touchdowns with his feet, while the Yellow Jackets' top eight rushers average more than 30 yards per game. All but one of them has reached the end

zone.

"Coach Johnson has done an incredible job everywhere he's been," Kelly said. "This year with Justin Thomas at quarterback and great depth at the running back position ... it's going to be a great challenge."

Senior Patrick Skov and freshman Marcus Marshall have run wild thus far, with Skov scoring four touchdowns and Marshall averaging more than 15 yards per attempt. But under Johnson, the focus is less on individual runners and more on the system as a whole.

Besides Thomas, none of Georgia Tech's top seven rushers from 2014 returned this season. Skov transferred from Stanford. Marshall is a true freshman. Thomas led the

Yellow Jackets in rushing yards last year but currently ranks fifth on the team.

Georgia Tech's brutal efficiency has impressed Kelly, but Johnson shied away from agreeing with the Notre Dame coach's assessment Wednesday.

"We'll see as the season plays out. I think we've played against two opponents that have been overmatched," Johnson said when told about Kelly's comments during his teleconference. "I don't know about the most prolific offense, but if we execute, I feel confident that we can move the ball."

In order to defend such a prolific scheme, Notre Dame needs to counter with a highly organized system of its own, Kelly said.

"First and foremost, when you settle on what your plan is and how you're going to defend the triple option, I think it goes to guys that have a good sense and a feel for what the plan is and how to defend triple option," Kelly said Tuesday. "So I think they've got to have a discipline about themselves. They've got to be guys that clearly understand the job in front of them and recognize what's being asked of them."

"So I think there's got to be some discipline. There's got to be clearly some athleticism there as well, but by and large, they've got to be able to pick up the schemes that we're trying to put together. So those are really important elements in this. If you're lost out there, you could be the greatest athlete in

the world, and if it doesn't make sense to you, you could be a liability trying to defend the triple option."

Last week against Virginia, the Irish gave up 416 yards, only 127 of which came on the ground. Notre Dame also held Texas to 60 yards rushing in its opening-week win. But both of those teams currently rank outside the top 100 in rushing offense and finished last season outside the top 50. With Georgia Tech, the Irish are well aware they are facing their toughest ground unit on the season.

"We know exactly what to expect from them, and now we've got to go out and execute defensively," Kelly said.

Even if the Irish defend well Saturday, they will still surrender plenty of yardage, Irish junior linebacker Jaylon Smith said. What the game will come down to is not giving up key plays.

"There's no true way to really stop it. There's a reason every year they're No. 1 or No. 2 in rushing," Smith said. "It's just a matter of eye discipline and making sure you're on your duty, you're on your job."

And if that wasn't difficult enough, the Irish secondary, which was torched by the Cavaliers last week, will still have to be on the lookout for the occasional pass. Thomas has thrown for three touchdowns this season, and the Yellow Jackets rank first in passing efficiency in the FBS, a category they topped last year as well.

"You really have to be disciplined in this game, as a corner," senior cornerback KeiVarae Russell said. "It can be an easy game if you stay disciplined and follow your guy around. ... You got to understand your role."

Contact Greg Hadley at ghadley@nd.edu



Courtesy of John Nakano | The Technique

Yellow Jackets senior B-back Patrick Skov finds a hole where his teammates blocked for him against Alcorn State on Sept. 3 at Bobby Dodd Stadium in Atlanta. Skov accounted for three of Georgia Tech's nine rushing touchdowns that game, a 69-6 win for the Yellow Jackets.

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with Professor Corey Angst, Associate Professor, Mendoza College of Business

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CATCHING UP WITH ...

Derrick Mayes '96

3 - 3:30 PM | ND Live Stage



CATCHING UP WITH ...

Regis Philbin '53

4:15 - 4:45 PM | ND Live Stage





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Project Drawdown
7:30 PM • September 29



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