

IRISH INSIDER

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SENIOR DAY ISSUE

JUST ONE GOAL

RONNIE STANLEY HAS A CHAMPIONSHIP ON HIS MIND AS THE SENIOR CLASS HOPES TO HEAD OUT ON A HIGH NOTE



THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Erin Rice and Zach Lorens

ND vs WF

COMMENTARY

Senior class has opportunity to bookend story



Greg Hadley
Editor-in-Chief

For Notre Dame's senior class, these final few weeks of the season represent a chance to finish where it started and maybe even go beyond.

As freshmen in 2012, Sheldon Day, Chris Brown, KeiVarae Russell, Ronnie Stanley and the rest were, for the most part, along the ride as the Irish went on a historic run to the BCS Championship Game.

As seniors in 2015, they are in position to lead a return to college football's biggest stage.

In between, just a few things have changed.

Everett Golson left, came back, then left again. Offensive coordinator Chuck Martin and defensive coordinator Bob Diaco have gone on to head coaching gigs elsewhere. Five players were suspended after an academic investigation in 2014, then another left before this season. FieldTurf replaced natural grass at Notre Dame Stadium. Heck, Notre Dame even switched from Adidas to Under Armour.

Yet here they are, in practically the same position they were in three years ago.

Even the Senior Day opponent — Wake Forest — is the same.

As freshmen, plenty of members of the class of 2016 saw the field as the Irish romped to a 38-0 win. As seniors, they will likely leave equally dominant.

Yes, yes, Notre Dame cannot afford to overlook the Demon Deacons. As feeble as its offense may be, Wake Forest could still surprise the Irish if they are unprepared. Their pass defense is solid as well.

But the Irish are 27-point favorites for a reason. They will, in all likelihood, roll to an easy win.

As with 2012, it's what comes after Wake Forest that really matters. And it's the first time since then that's been the case.

The 2013 and 2014 Senior Day games were not particularly

triumphant affairs. Playing in 26-degree cold and snow in 2013, the Irish came away with the win against BYU, but after a title game run in 2012, it was a letdown. In 2014, Notre Dame's second-half collapse continued with a humiliating loss to Louisville.

Both times, the season was, for all intents and purposes, over before the game even began. Not so this year.

All this is despite the staggering number of injuries that hit the Irish early this season. Indeed, the team's ability to bounce back strong from those obstacles can be attributed to the leadership these seniors have provided.

The experiences of this 2016 class inform the overall character of this team. They've been all the way to the brink of a title, they've experienced the frustrations of mediocrity, they know what it's like to have defeat snatched from the jaws of victory, and they've felt the embarrassment of completely falling apart at the end of a long season. In short, they've done it all.

From that perspective, it's not at all surprising Day and Stanley decided to return to Notre Dame for their senior seasons despite the prospects of NFL Draft money. They've tasted success and then had it taken away. They want more.

That hunger has trickled down to the younger classes, and thus far this season, it has paid off. After crumbling last season following the loss to Florida State, the Irish have stayed strong after a similarly stunning loss to Clemson.

Like 2012, Wake Forest is just another step towards a fitting end for this senior class. Like 2012, the Irish are no longer playing just for pride on Senior Day.

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



EMMET FARNAN | The Observer

Irish graduate student receiver Amir Carlisle looks to run after making a catch during Notre Dame's 42-30 victory over Pittsburgh on Saturday. Carlisle spent his freshman year at USC before joining the Irish.

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

- Dorothy Day

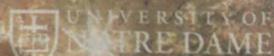
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EMMET FARNAN | The Observer

Irish senior defensive lineman Sheldon Day attempts to beat a Pittsburgh offensive lineman during Notre Dame's win Saturday.



By BRIAN PLAMONDON
Sports Writer

Just like every other senior, Irish left tackle Ronnie Stanley will run out of the tunnel Saturday and greet his family at the beginning of Notre Dame's annual Senior Day game. Nothing will be extraordinary about the sequence for Stanley — except for the fact that there was a chance it was never going to happen.

After a standout 2014 season, Stanley was seen by draft experts as a first-round lock, potentially the top offensive lineman taken in the 2015 NFL Draft. Instead, Stanley decided to come back to Notre Dame, saying that his decision was based on one thing and one thing only: a national championship.

"Just knowing how good the team was going to be, and how many players were returning [was huge]," Stanley said. "That was really something that influenced my decision, and knowing our team would be really good this year. And me being able to be a leader on the team was really important to me as well."

Despite his choice to shun NFL

riches for another year, it didn't mean Stanley hasn't had NFL aspirations all his life. On a recent episode of Showtime's "A Season With Notre Dame," Stanley's mother, Juli, said that when Ronnie was 12-years old he told her to hold on to his football card "because it's going to be worth money one day."

After a standout high school career that saw Stanley's Bishop Gorman team win three straight Nevada Class 4A titles, he saw limited action his freshman season for the Irish. In 2013, the 6-foot-5, 315-pound lineman started all 13 games at right tackle before shifting over and anchoring the line at left tackle the last two seasons.

Stanley has come into his own as a leader for the Irish in 2015, but not in the way he may have envisioned it before the season. When Showtime released a trailer for the program's debut episode, a clip was leaked that showed Irish head coach Brian Kelly explaining to the team that Stanley would not be able to accept his captainship. Stanley later met with reporters and explained that it was for "parking reasons."

"I'm looked at as a leader by

teammates and coaches, so I don't need a 'C' on my chest to know what role I have on this team," Stanley said Sept. 16. "I never needed that growing up, and I don't need it now. I definitely still accept the position I'm in, and I'm fully ready to do what I have to do for my team."

For Stanley, this season isn't too much of a departure in terms of how vocal he is with teammates — the added wrinkle is that a lot of the offensive line and even the offense as a whole looks up to him.

"I've always been comfortable kind of telling people how I feel," Stanley said. "And even telling people what they should do if they're not doing things right. The only different thing is just the way other people are just accepting the leadership I'm trying to give them."

Stanley isn't the only one noticing a difference in the way people take to his leadership. Kelly singled out Stanley and senior defensive lineman Sheldon Day for their significance in Notre Dame's success so far this season.

"When your best players are your best leaders, it changes the dynamics of everything that you do because they're out there in practice, setting a standard," Kelly said. "They're in the locker room setting a standard, and then they're on the field in the way they compete setting a standard. So I don't want to attribute all of it to them, but we wouldn't be where we are right now without those two guys back in 2015."

Day had the same decision to make as Stanley back in January about whether or not to come back for his senior season. After Day decided to return, Stanley joined him after watching Ohio State win the national championship and realizing he couldn't leave his college days behind without one himself.

"We were driving home, and [Stanley] said it will be crazy because we wouldn't be able to experience something like this," Day said of the thought that they both would have turned pro. "And just the guys in the locker room and how much fun we're having this season, and just being around the guys, it's crazy that if we would have went the other way how things would have been much different."

Much of Stanley's decision revolved around the fact that the



ZACH LLORENS | The Observer

Irish senior offensive lineman Ronnie Stanley scans the defense in Notre Dame's 24-20 win over Temple on Oct. 31 in Philadelphia.

Notre Dame team had unfinished business in the national championship game. Despite the highs of its appearance there his freshman year and the lows of a 1-4 November in a promising season last year, Stanley said the one constant was that this team had the type of players necessary to compete at the highest level.

"We understood what we had in front of us and understood the talent we had," Stanley said of the senior class's expectations of this season. "Being in the national championship, we knew we had the talent to be in the game this year. That was the main thing — the experiencing going and seeing the talent that was there."

For the Irish, Stanley and the rest of the senior class represent the last group that will have been on the sideline for Notre Dame's BCS Championship Game appearance, outside of a few potential fifth years next year. Although his decision to come back rested on the potential for the Irish to make it to Glendale, Arizona, Stanley has made a point to enjoy every aspect of his senior year.

"It's really just trying to cherish the last few weeks I have left with these guys," Stanley said. "Really reflect on the relationships we built

with each other from freshmen and seeing some of the guys turn into the great players and guys they are now."

Although Stanley technically has one more year of eligibility remaining due to a redshirt year in 2012, it would be a shock if the mammoth left tackle decided to return for the 2016 season. Still, the Las Vegas product has so far been content with his decision, glad to enjoy another season with the teammates he has spent the last four seasons in the trenches with.

"It's been a long journey," Stanley said. "But I'm happy with the decision I made. I'd make the same decision again, no regrets."

With just three regular season games remaining, Saturday is the first step towards fulfilling Stanley's dream of making it back to the championship game, and this time, coming home victorious. Stanley's other dream will have to wait just a little while longer.

"It's definitely crossed my mind what it would have been like [in the NFL]," Stanley said. "But it never really took me away from being focused on the task at hand here, what we're trying to accomplish."

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TRAVIS ALLEN | DB | LANSING, MICHIGAN

Allen trades green and white for blue and gold

By ALEXANDER BENDER
Sports Writer

For senior defensive back Travis Allen, coming to Notre Dame was not a lifelong dream. In fact, the school didn't come up on his radar until the end of high school, but once he received that acceptance letter, it was clear to him what he had to do.

"I'm from Lansing, Michigan, right near Michigan State. I didn't really think about ND until late in my senior year, but once I got in, I couldn't pass up the academics, and it's the best decision I ever made," Allen said.

Allen, a three-sport athlete in high school, passed up several Division II offers when he chose Notre Dame.

"During high school, I played football, basketball and ran track all four years. To be honest, basketball was my favorite sport, but I knew my best chance to play in college was going to be in football," Allen said. "We had some good competition in Lansing, so it was great for me growing up there and getting to face that competition."

Living just miles from the Michigan State campus, Allen

said he attended every Spartan sporting event he could when he was younger.

"Growing up, I was one of the biggest MSU fans," Allen said. "My mom went there, and I tried my best to go to all of the football and basketball games. A close friend of mine was a walk-on there, so we had a little competition that first year, but thankfully I came out on top. It's always fun going back there, and even now I still can't bring myself to root against them."

After four years at Notre Dame, however, Allen said he has received much more from the University than he could have ever expected. A marketing major in the Mendoza College of Business, Allen said he is not sure what his future holds is just yet.

"I've been surprised by all that you learn and the connections you make through ND," Allen said. "I'm hoping to do marketing or management in the sports field but I'm not set on that. Notre Dame really helps you to figure out what it is you want to do after college."

In addition to his education, Allen said he realizes he is part of a select group that has suited up for the Irish football team,

a part of his life that has had a huge impact on him.

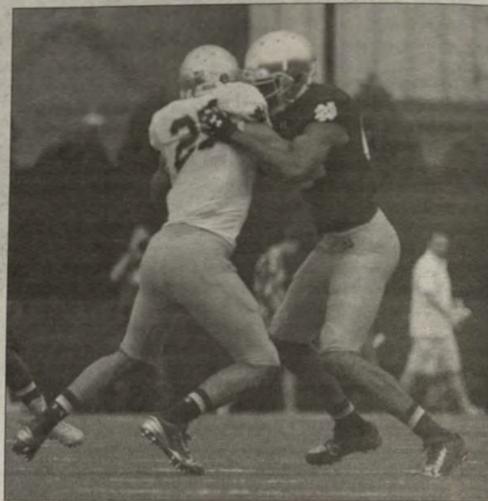
"Playing on this team has been amazing. I still remember the first time I ran out of the tunnel," Allen said. "We had the Michigan game under the lights, first game of the year. It's a dream, and it was great. Being on the field with guys you will have friendships with for the rest of your life is amazing because of all of the camaraderie on and off the field, and I can't believe how fortunate I am to have this experience."

Now, in his final season with the Irish, Allen said he is making sure he enjoys every last bit of time he has with the program.

"It's been everything I could hope for and just knowing it's the last time going out there and doing this stuff makes you not take anything for granted," Allen said. "It's tough not to get caught up in any moment. I know that last home game will be special and I'll just try to take it all in."

"The season's not over yet though, and I hope to make even more memories with the time I have left on the team."

Allen said his Notre Dame experience has been much more



Irish senior defensive back Travis Allen, left, takes on a block during the Blue-Gold Game on April 18 at LaBar Practice Complex.

than just the football team, though.

"I feel like I am a well-rounded person now because of ND," Allen said. "In both academics and athletics, being around great people 24/7 makes you a better person. It's just about growing and being the best

person you can be in all walks of life.

"You never know what you might come across any given day, and that's what sticks with me."

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NICKY BARRATI | S | TOMBALL, TEXAS

Versatile Barrati 'grateful' for time on campus

By BRENNA MOXLEY
Sports Writer

Senior safety Nicky Barrati first visited Notre Dame with his dad during his junior year of high school and "fell in love with it." He visited again that same year for the spring game, and that's when he decided to make his verbal commitment to Notre Dame. He had scholarship offers from 12

other Division I schools but said he did not really consider going anywhere else.

From Tomball, Texas, Barrati attended Klein Oak High School, where he played up to five different positions in a game — quarterback, running back, receiver, tight end and safety. He is the son of Clarke and Jill Barrati. Barrati is enrolled in the Mendoza College of Business, majoring in

management consulting.

Barrati reflected on the difficulty of adjusting to college life while also balancing academics and playing a sport.

"I was prepared physically, but not mentally," he said.

Barrati explained "school was hard," and at first, he struggled with the transitions between football camp, season and off-season. He added that after his first injury, it was a tough shift from playing a sport and going to school, to simply watching a sport and going to school.

However, he clarified that now he has adjusted to balancing the two and is "really good at it."

Barrati experienced shoulder injuries that kept him off the field for his entire sophomore season and most of his junior year.

"It made me see the bigger picture," he said. "You come in thinking that you're going to play all four years. Once you continue to get knocked down, it gives you a bigger perspective on life. Life is more than just a game."

Barrati became the first Irish freshman in four seasons to record an interception when he picked off former Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson in 2012.

"I really enjoyed that moment here against Michigan, our rival. It

was a cool feeling," he said.

However, Barrati said he didn't want one play to define his time at Notre Dame.

"I did great my freshman year and I played a lot, but I don't want that to state who I was here as a player," Barrati said. "I have been trying to make big plays as I get older."

When he did get on the field his junior year, Barrati made an impact, recovering a fumble in last year's season-opening win over Rice.

But Barrati said his favorite memory wasn't either of those plays — rather, it was one focused on a team accomplishment.

"When we beat Southern Cal at Southern Cal my freshman year," he said. "That was our ticket into the [BCS] National Championship. The atmosphere was so cool, we were just so happy, we were so hyped that we finally did it."

Barrati said he has multiple close friends on the team, particularly a few players outside his own class.

"I'm pretty close with [junior linebacker] James Onwuulu," he said. "He came in early, and we hung out together. I helped him when he first got here, and we just connected."

Barrati said he decided to

enroll in the Mendoza College of Business because when he committed, he knew Notre Dame had the top-ranked business school in the nation, and he felt like he had to take advantage of the program.

"Both of my parents have been in business their whole lives, and there's so much you can do with a business degree," Barrati said.

However, Barrati said his future post-graduation isn't as definite.

"Oh man, I don't know. Probably find a job," he said.

However, there's another option on the table, as he is eligible to play a fifth year.

"Deciding whether I will be playing a fifth year or not would be the first thing to do," he said. "Time will tell toward the end of the season."

Barrati said he's thankful of the chance he had to compete at Notre Dame.

"I'm grateful that I got the opportunity to come here," Barrati said. "Although it hasn't been what I dreamed of playing-wise, it has been a great experience. It has made me grow up so much and become a man."

"I could not be more grateful for that, or for this University."

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JOSH ANDERSON | RB | CHATSWORTH, CALIFORNIA

Anderson gets his moment on and off the field

By MOLLY MURPHY
Sports Writer

For Josh Anderson, a 5-foot-9 running back from Chatsworth, California, just attending the University of Notre Dame was a lifelong goal.

"I've wanted to go to Notre Dame my entire life," Anderson said. "My father went here, so

I've always had that connection to Notre Dame."

Add in the fact Anderson was able to walk onto the Notre Dame football team — and earn a scholarship before his senior year — his time here has been, in his words, "surreal."

Anderson began his Notre Dame football journey in his senior year of high school.



Irish senior running back Josh Anderson lines up before a play during the Blue-Gold Game on April 18 at LaBar Practice Complex.

"I was a preferred walk-on," Anderson said. "I actually got invited to a spring visitation here, so I came and met with [receivers coach Mike] Coach Denbrock, and he said, 'Yeah, we want you on the team,' and that's basically how it started."

The next few years, were, according to Anderson, filled with "relentless effort, teamwork and determination," as Anderson struggled to prove himself.

"Starting as a walk-on here at Notre Dame, you kind of start from the bottom, you gotta earn your reps, you gotta show people, show the coaches that you know how to play ball and that you can learn and that you can get better," he said.

Anderson said the key to his success as a walk-on was taking advantage of chances.

"When you get an opportunity, you need to perform, and I'd say that I was able to do that at certain times, and that's what helped me," Anderson said.

Anderson also credits the support and inspiration he received from former walk-on running back Tyler Plantz and his father as being especially helpful during his time at Notre Dame.

"I just looked at the older walk-ons, and I saw how hard they worked," Anderson said. "Tyler Plantz, he was a walk-on before me, running back, and

I saw how hard he worked and what he did on a daily basis, and he kind of influenced me to work as hard or harder every single day. And then my father, he basically said, 'Go out there and be you, do what you want to do, carve your own path.'"

By his senior year, Anderson's hard work was rewarded when head coach Brian Kelly awarded him a scholarship.

"My dream came true," Anderson said. "I've always wanted to be a scholarship athlete at the University of Notre Dame. I wanted to be known as an elite athlete, and I can't even tell you, all my hard work paid off. It's something that I can't even believe I was able to accomplish."

Anderson's other cherished memories of his time on the Notre Dame football team include this year's game against Texas, where he carried the ball twice.

"Getting called out in that first Texas game, getting to go out on the field and taking a few plays — it was just unbelievable," Anderson said. "Looking at the lights, the 80-plus thousand people around. I've gotta say that was just spectacular."

Although Anderson has achieved many goals already, he is still focused on his future and is currently studying to become a doctor.

"I plan on getting my masters

degree in global health if I can, if I get into that program, and then after that I want to go to medical school, hopefully somewhere back on the West Coast," Anderson said. "But who knows, you never know where I may end up. And then become a doctor, that's my goal."

When asked what he would like to do with his medical degree, Anderson noted a particular interest in sports medicine.

"Maybe being a team doctor somewhere," he said. "That would be an ideal dream job for me."

But even with the future in mind, with his senior season winding down, it is difficult for Anderson not to feel nostalgic.

"There's nothing like playing football and going out there on the field every day with the teammates," he said. "Even when it's a grind, I'm gonna miss that."

Anderson said he continues to make the most of every remaining moment, however.

"Just today at practice, I had a great time just because you can only put those pads on so many times, and football is an amazing sport, and yeah, I'm gonna miss putting those pads on and being out there with my brothers," he said.

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CAM BRYAN | WR | WESTWOOD, MASSACHUSETTS

Bryan basks in complete ND football experience

By KIT LOUGHRAN
Sports Writer

Interhall to Division I football is a pretty big jump in playing level — even more so for someone who had never touched a football growing up.

But graduate student Cam Bryan did just that.

"When I came in as a freshman, I weighed about 160 pounds and had never played football before," Bryan said. "I played basketball in high school, and then a buddy of mine talked me into playing interhall football [for Stanford Hall]."

After one season competing for the Griffins, Bryan decided in the spring of 2014 to pursue a long-time dream: to play football for the Irish.

"I started to lift some weights, and my junior year, and I just felt like trying out on a whim," the Westwood, Massachusetts, native said. "Some of the assistant coaches took a risk on me, especially in letting a kid who had never played before on the team."

"I was just learning the sport as it came along, rolling with the punches and trying to prove to them that I belong here and am worth the investment."

But making the roster didn't happen overnight for the 6-foot-2, and now 207-pound graduate student receiver.

"I had friends on the team, and [graduate student center] Nick

Martin is one of my best friends who helped me out with a lot of training," Bryan said. "We put together a workout program and exercises to get in shape and physically ready for the try out."

"[The coaches] told me nothing was guaranteed, but I picked it up as best I could and just tried to stay around here as long as possible."

Bryan did stick around after those tryouts more than two years ago. The graduate student wasn't ready to give up on his team just yet.

"I'm just here for an extra semester to be part of the team," Bryan said. "I knew this year was going to be a special year for the team, and I didn't want to sit back and be watching the national championship from my office, so I felt like I had to come back and be a part of it all."

While Bryan missed the famed, undefeated 2012 season, he said there were plenty of games in his career to make up for, including one in particular.

"The best game being on the field for was definitely Stanford last year when we came back and [former Irish quarterback] Everett [Golson] threw the touchdown to Koyack in the end zone," Bryan said. "It was just a roller coaster of emotions, and being a part of that on the sidelines was awesome."

And before every player makes it to the sideline, there's

one game time tradition that has made Bryan's — as well as many others' — Notre Dame football experience all the more memorable.

"It's cliché, but running out of the tunnel [is my favorite game moment]," Bryan said. "It's the coolest feeling in the world because it doesn't matter if you're [junior wide receiver] Will Fuller or me, you still feel like you could run through a wall."

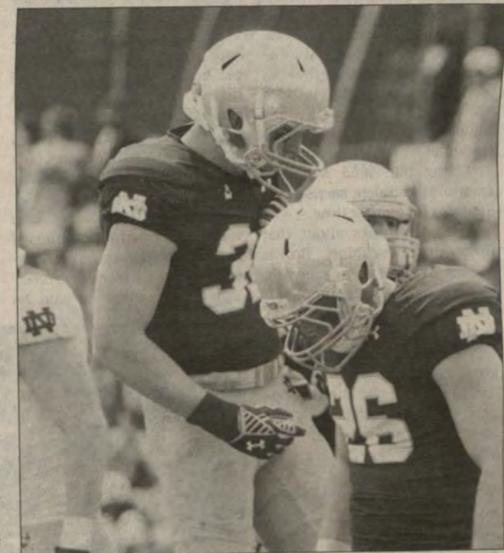
"And then once the game starts you kind of realize that you're not Fuller, you can't run through a wall," Bryan laughed.

"But it's just an awesome feeling. To have just one of those feelings left is bittersweet, but to get to experience that when thousands of people wish they could just once has been an unbelievable privilege."

And beyond running through the tunnel, Bryan said he considers his time at Notre Dame an even more unbelievable privilege.

"To be honest, it was kind of a long shot that I would get in here; I didn't think that I would," Bryan said. "It was always a dream school of mine, so I kind of just applied not thinking I would get in, got waitlisted, then accepted. Then I just had no choice but to come here."

"... Notre Dame has been an unreal experience for me, and it has really just changed my life. It's turned my life around and



Irish senior receiver Cam Bryan, left, warms up with teammates before the Blue-Gold Game on April 18 at LaBar Practice Complex.

me into a person that my family can be proud of.

It's been pretty unbelievable, to see who I was then and who I am now."

His final semester and season at Notre Dame coming to an end, Bryan now prepares to wear a new uniform every day — after the Irish take on Wake Forest this weekend, Boston College on

Nov. 21 and Stanford on Nov. 28, that is.

"I'm going to be working in investment banking in Boston for Raymond James," Bryan said.

"The suit and tie won't be as much fun as the gold helmet, but you have to grow up some time."

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CHRIS BROWN | WR | HANAHAN, SOUTH CAROLINA

Brown transforms experience into leadership role

By MARY GREEN
Assistant Managing Editor

Brian Kelly said earlier this week he would look back on this year's senior class as one that helped build the program back to national prominence, and receiver Chris Brown has been there through it all.

As one of only two current seniors to have played in each of the 48 games of his career so far, the other being defensive lineman Romeo Okwara, Brown has been about as consistent as they come.

So when it came time for him to select just one moment over that four-year span as the high point, he's happy to oblige, but he'll take a moment to sort through his memories before bringing you back almost to the beginning.

"My freshman year, coming out of the tunnel at USC, obviously we know if we win that game, we go to the championship. Just the electricity in the stadium and after that game, seeing Coach Kelly getting dumped with the Gatorade bath, know that we were going to the national championship — that was just a great experience," he said.

Thanks in part to Brown's consistency as a receiver this season especially — he's second on the team with 34 catches for 424 total yards, just five grabs and 124 yards short of career bests — the Irish could be in a similar position before they take the field against Stanford on Nov. 28, in contention to compete for a national championship for the second time in four years.

But first, Brown and his fellow seniors will have to run out of the tunnel at Notre Dame Stadium and sing the Alma Mater in front of the student section this Saturday for one last time.

When he thinks about that upcoming inevitability, Brown pauses to take a deep breath, and his voice lowers into a soft speech before he slowly breaks out into a smile.

"I feel like it'll be a moment of great joy but mostly just being thankful, thankful for the opportunity to play for this great university and represent this school and play for this team," he said.

Kelly said Sept. 29 that when his staff was recruiting him, Brown "really wanted to be at Notre Dame," and how that desire translated into the strong work ethic the receiver has carried with him since day one, an idea the Hanahan, South Carolina, native shared.

"Not being really recruited out of high school — I got a couple teams that were recruiting me and stuff — but I really felt like Notre Dame gave me the opportunity to compete because that's one of the biggest things I try to bring every day, and they weren't saying, 'You're gonna play this,

you're gonna play that,'" Brown said. "They were like, 'We're gonna give you a chance to come here, get a great education, get better and compete,' so that's about as real as it can get."

He was able to compete right away, appearing in the 2012 season opener against Navy, but his first catch came at an opportune moment as a first-year player could hope for. The Irish were on the road against Oklahoma in late October with their undefeated season on the line, and the game was tied at 13 in the fourth quarter.

Brown didn't have a single reception to his name at that point, but quarterback Everett Golson found him deep for a 50-yard gain that set up the game-winning touchdown five plays later.

"I've had some pretty good catches, but I always tell people when they ask me about it that the only thing I can remember from that is coming to the sideline and [tight end Tyler] Eifert being on my left, and him saying, 'That was a big catch. You know that, right?' And I looked at him, and it was kinda like, 'Yeah, I guess so,' and I'm thinking in my head, 'Thank God I caught it,'" he said. "That's one thing I can remember from it."

Though he already had seven games under his belt at that point, Brown admitted that at that time, "I was extremely clueless. I'm like, 'I just caught a bomb, so I'm pretty excited about that, but I'm just waiting until that next opportunity comes.'"

It took a while before that next opportunity came and even longer before the receiver found himself in the end zone, but that happened the next season against Air Force, a game Brown said will always stick out in his mind when he looks back on his Notre Dame career.

By the time his second season was over, Brown found himself in a new position as the most veteran player in receivers' meetings. That's when he said he

realized it was his time to step into the role of the group's leader, and he hasn't looked back since.

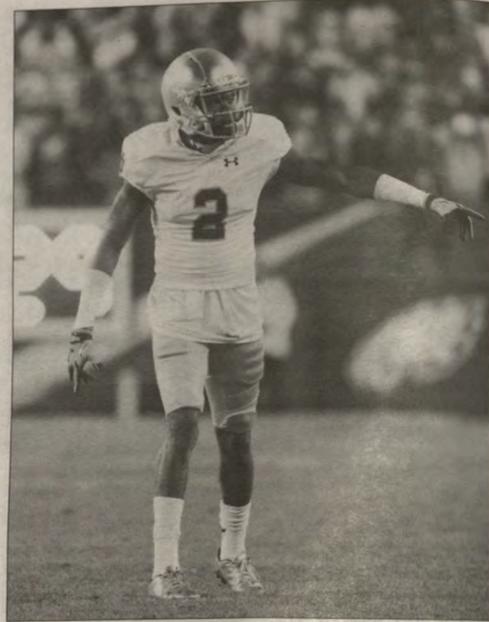
"I'd say it was I guess the beginning of my junior year," he said. "I was the oldest guy in the room as a junior, so I had a bunch of really talented receivers in there, and I figured, if I step up and lead us in a good direction, we'll become collectively a whole as a unit, and we'll be unstoppable."

But the role was one Brown had to grow into through his first two seasons. While he struggled at times on the field, especially in the stretch between the Oklahoma game his freshman year and Air Force the following season, he relied on hard work to better his own game each time he took the field, and the confidence to lead came with it.

"Just knowing that I'm taking care of my business and coming to work every single day really allowed myself to feel comfortable enough speaking out and speaking to younger guys and letting them know that, 'This is the right way you should do it,'" he said of his growth on the team. "From guys from the past, Tyler Eifert, [receiver] T.J. Jones, just seeing how they took care of business and their things and did everything the right way, and that gives you a little bit of authority to tell people, 'This is how we should do it,' and that's the standard that, when you're a senior, you try to leave, so that way the juniors, they pick that up, and the momentum carries it on."

Alongside former teammates Eifert and Jones, Brown credited the professors in Notre Dame's Africana studies department as people who have helped him grow into a more vocal role in the classroom, which he said has translated to the field. He said that reason was ultimately why he chose Africana studies as his major.

"Just great teachers, teachers that — and this can be attributed to Notre Dame and the way they hire teachers — teachers that



ZACH LLORENS | The Observer

Irish senior receiver Chris Brown checks his positioning before a play during Notre Dame's 24-20 victory over Temple on Oct. 31.

really challenge me, teachers that made me feel comfortable expressing my opinions because I'm not the most talkative person when it comes to being in the classroom and stuff, but they really, not force me, but they really challenge me to get my voice out, and it made me feel really comfortable with them, and I've been blessed to have them throughout my process," he said.

After Brown wraps up his final season in an Irish uniform and crosses the stage to receive his Notre Dame diploma, he said, "Hopefully, I have the opportunity to take my talents to the next level and just continue to pursue my dream."

It's a little more of an unknown of what he will do once his football career comes to a close, though, he said.

"But I definitely want to work

into a position where I can help kids in that seventh-to-eighth grade area where a lot of kids go astray if they don't have the right kind of guidance system," he said. "I saw guys that were just as talented as me in South Carolina go down the wrong path, just not having the right guidance, and I feel like that's where a lot of kids can use extra guidance, almost like a big brother program."

But there are still more immediate things Brown has to attend to first before he can continue his leadership role in new capacities.

"The last time I run out of the tunnel — a lot of emotions ... but a lot of good emotions, but at the end of the day, it's about that win," he said. "That'll make it a sealed Senior Day."

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ZACH LLORENS | The Observer

Senior receiver Chris Brown hauls in one of his team-leading six receptions in front of Temple sophomore defensive back Sean Chandler during Notre Dame's 24-20 victory over the Owls on Oct. 31 at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia. Brown led the Irish with 72 receiving yards.

AMIR CARLISLE | WR | SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA

Career takes Carlisle in opposite directions

By MARY GREEN
Assistant Managing Editor

Amir Carlisle's collegiate career has been defined by transitions.

After his freshman season, the Santa Clara, California, native transferred from USC to Notre Dame.

He sat out the entirety of his first year with the Irish with an ankle injury and had to battle back to play at running back his junior year.

Then he moved down the hall to the receivers' room his senior season, lining up in the slot instead of the backfield.

Now the graduate student is wrapping up his fifth year, having found a home both at Notre Dame and with his fellow receivers.

"It's been very fun in receivers' room this year," Carlisle said. "It's a competitive room, but we're really close on the field, and we're really close off the field, so I really think that kind of depicts itself on the field because we're such a unified group. We push each other to get better on a daily basis, so it's definitely a fun experience, working with the guys, and I really enjoy it being the same guys from last year, and we've really had that opportunity to really build that camaraderie together."

As he continued to adjust to the new position last season, Carlisle totaled 23 receptions for 309 yards and three scores. Through the first nine games of this season, he's up to 21 catches for 222 yards, averaging 24.7 yards per game in a unit that's pulling in nearly 270 passing yards each week.

"Just having experience playing from previous years has increased my football intelligence, so just being able to go out there and understand the nuances of the game and to be able to pass that on to the younger guys has been fun," Carlisle said of what he brings to the group.

But he wasn't always a receiver, and he wasn't even at Notre Dame when he began his collegiate career four years ago.

"It was just a faith-based decision," he said of his move from the Trojans to the Irish. "We really prayed about it because obviously going from USC to Notre Dame and being rivals, I didn't really think it'd be possible at first, but God opened up a door, and it was a door that I couldn't pass on, so I really couldn't pass up the opportunity to come here when that opportunity was opened. It was a faith-based decision, and it was a decision I'm happy with."

Another decision came after the Music City Bowl last December, when Carlisle had to figure out if he wanted to stay in South Bend for another season and make up for the year he missed because of the ankle injury. He said he realized it wasn't time to go just yet, and his return meant all the mainstays of the 2014 receivers group would be back on the team for another season.

"For me, it's always faith-based decisions, just praying about



EMMET FARNAN | The Observer

Irish graduate student receiver Amir Carlisle hauls in a reception and looks to shake two defenders during Notre Dame's 42-30 victory over Pittsburgh on Saturday at Heinz Field. Carlisle hauled in four catches for 30 yards to bump his season totals to 21 receptions for 222 yards.

things, and I didn't feel like my time here was over, and God had more in store for me and this team here, so it was just a faith-based decision, and I've loved my time here, and it's been a blessing to be able to be here for a fifth year," he said.

As one of 10 graduate students on the Irish roster, a group that includes fellow starters such as center Nick Martin, cornerback Matthias Farley and linebacker Joe Schmidt, Carlisle contributes to a leader-heavy unit of Notre Dame's most senior players.

"We have a lot of strong leaders at the top of the team," he said. "It's also been fun that we're kind of the old guys around the block now. It kind of feels weird because it feels like yesterday when I was a freshman, but it's definitely been cool to be around another year with the guys I've been around for several years now."

While, for the first time, Carlisle's situation in football has stayed the same from one year to the next — no transferring schools, no injuries to recover from, no position switches — his non-football schedule has undergone a transformation from taking a full classload as an undergraduate student.

"The primary difference has just been being able to focus more on football and a little less on the schoolwork because I've got my degree now and kind of just taking some classes that really don't mean much, so being able to focus more on my craft and just having a little more free time, so it's more of a relaxing kind of lifestyle, definitely," he said.

The receiver said he is enrolled in just one graduate course this semester, "Building a High-Tech Startup," after he received his degree in information technology

management from the Mendoza College of Business last May.

"Though the duties assigned to being a starter on a 9-1 squad certainly consume a large part of his day, Carlisle said he enjoys taking the lessons from that class and researching different startups online.

"I'm really big into technology and stuff, so I really like to, in my free time, just learn more about that and like coding language and stuff, so that's what I've been doing this semester," he said.

Carlisle said he will prepare for and participate in Notre Dame's on-campus pro day once this season wraps up, but he also has his mind set on using what he's learning right now in his future endeavors.

"Eventually, further away, when football is over for me, I definitely want to go back home, Silicon Valley, and really delve into the startup world," he said. "That's my career goal in terms of when football is over."

Even if he ends up back where he started in California, Carlisle said he will keep up the bonds he has formed at Notre Dame.

"There's so many different types of resources that are available to us as student-athletes here, and that's kind of been the most eye-opening experience for me is just meeting so many different people from so many different backgrounds and around the world actually," he said. "That's just really been an eye-opening experience and something that I just look forward to, building more connections with future Notre Dame graduates as I kind of transition out of here."

Contact Mary Green at mgreen8@nd.edu



Observer File Photo

Graduate student receiver Amir Carlisle returns a kickoff during Notre Dame's 49-39 win over Navy on Nov. 1, 2014, at FedEx Field.

CONNOR CAVALARIS | CB | LAKE FOREST, ILLINOIS

Cavalaris earns scholarship through trust

By MAREK MAZUREK
Sports Writer

There are many ways of thinking about the word "scholarship." For some, it's an expected honor after being designated as a five-star recruit. For Connor Cavalaris, it was the recognition of a job well done.

A graduate student from Lake Forest, Illinois, Cavalaris had a choice to make coming out of high school. He could commit to a smaller school and potentially get a starting job, or he could come to Notre Dame and not be guaranteed anything. Cavalaris said he always wanted to go to Notre Dame despite not receiving a scholarship because he wanted to stay close to home.

"Growing up in Chicago, Notre Dame's got such a powerful following," the cornerback said. "As a young kid being exposed to that, it's something you know you always want to be a part of that sort of tradition. ... I'm about two hours away, so one of the best things about my five years here was being able to share the experiences with my family and friends."

While sharing his accomplishments with his loved ones certainly played a large role in his decision to attend Notre Dame, Cavalaris also said he wasn't going to give up on

his dream of playing college football either.

"I wanted to go somewhere where I knew I could challenge myself," Cavalaris said. "I believed in myself as a player and wanted to go somewhere where I held myself to a high standard and compete with some of the best athletes in the country."

Though Cavalaris believed in himself, he said it was rough adjusting to the collegiate level of play during his first year.

"I remember as freshman, it's definitely overwhelming to start playing at a big college football program," Cavalaris said. "You have to learn from the guys above you, the older guys. It's a long process. ... You have to earn the trust of your coaches and perform on the practice field, you have to earn their trust to be able to go in and perform in games. And then, when you get the opportunity, you have to go and run with it."

Cavalaris' big opportunity came when the team put him in during the BCS Championship Game against Alabama in his sophomore season. Though the Irish lost, Cavalaris recorded two tackles and said playing in the national championship is a moment he will never forget.

"It was an amazing experience,"

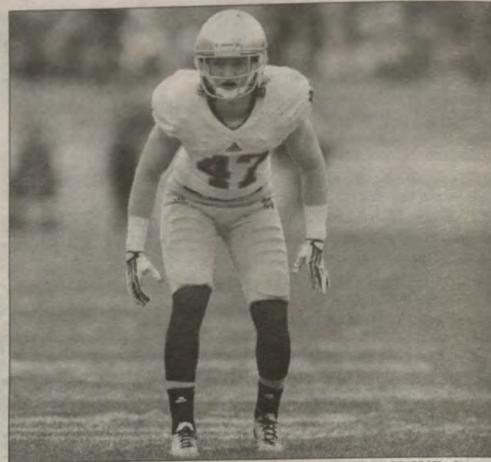
Cavalaris said. "It's the biggest stage for our sport. I remember the emotion going into it. I had my family in the crowd. I don't really remember a ton about the game. When the coaches trust you to go out there and perform at that big of a stage, it's definitely exciting and an experience I'll remember the rest of my life."

With a championship game and two more years of experience under his belt, Cavalaris' hard work paid off, and he was awarded a scholarship going into his senior year last season.

"It was a great feeling," Cavalaris said. "To be recognized in that way by your coaches and your peers, it's really special. All the walk-ons put in a lot of hard work and a lot of stuff that goes unrecognized. When they announced it and to hear the roar of your fellow teammates who you've worked so hard with for the past four years and they know you've been with them every step of the way, that's what's been very gratifying."

Now in his fifth year, Cavalaris said that he doesn't take anything for granted and tries to impart the mentality that has worked for him to the younger players on this year's team as the season nears its end.

"Being a fifth-year senior, you know it's one day at a time,"



CAROLINE GENCO | The Observer

Irish graduate student cornerback Connor Cavalaris lines up during the Blue and Gold game on April 12, 2014 at Notre Dame Stadium.

Cavalaris said. "It's one practice at a time. You can't think that far down the road, you have to take one game at a time. This team has a lot of talent, a lot of potential, we're all working hard. ... You have to handle the next step in front of you first."

And though he is not thinking too far ahead of himself where football is concerned, Cavalaris did say

he plans to get a job in the financial world after he finishes his masters degree in accounting.

"I'm hoping to get into investment banking," Cavalaris said. "I'll finish up my masters in accounting this December, and I'll see where it goes from there."

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MARK HARRELL | OL | CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Harrell typifies 'right kind of guy' for Irish

By MAUREEN SCHWENINGER
Sports Writer

Irish head coach Brian Kelly's early recruiting mantra was finding the RKGs — the "right kind of guys" — for Notre Dame's program. When senior offensive lineman Mark Harrell walked onto campus in 2012, Kelly said he fit that bill.

"[RKGs] have to have the right character traits," Kelly said Feb. 1, 2012. "They have to understand Notre Dame and the value of an education, and Mark Harrell comes from that environment."

Hailing from Charlotte, North Carolina, the three-star prospect was an early commit. He didn't have a childhood affinity

for the Irish, but he said he saw something special in South Bend after his first visit.

"When the process started, I didn't have any biases toward one particular school," Harrell said. "But I always saw ND as a place that was prestigious. As far as I was concerned, Notre Dame was the only one that could offer both an unbelievable athletic experience as well as that academic experience."

Though Harrell redshirted his freshman year, he said he was still able to travel and dress with the team in the 2013 BCS Championship Game.

"Despite being in the reserve, I was able to go with the team and experience that," Harrell said. "That was awesome and

obviously something I'll never forget."

He played right guard and center as a sophomore but saw no playing time until his third year, making appearances against Rice and Michigan. This season, he's participated in three games at right tackle. The depth behind the Irish offensive line was a hurdle for Harrell, but he said he has taken it all in stride with his positive attitude.

"Hopefully I'm an RKG in the light that I show up every day and try to be better, make the people around me better," he said. "You have to hold yourself accountable, both academically and on the field. You have to learn to sacrifice the things you

want to do to make the team the best it can be."

A sociable person, Harrell said he has especially appreciated the brotherhood of the offensive line that he has found and fostered as a senior leader.

"You do so much with your position group, with the O-line," he said. "We're just so close with everyone there. The experiences I've had with the guys in my position group over the years — new kids, guys who have graduated — are really memorable."

The larger Irish community has also been a highlight of Harrell's Notre Dame experience. He said he's felt a togetherness with the student body that many other colleges can't offer.

"The greatest thing about ND as a whole is the immersion between student-athletes and regular students who don't play varsity sports," Harrell said. "It's so different than other schools, where they try to isolate the athletes in certain areas and certain classes. The cultural immersion has been amazing."

Harrell took advantage of an opportunity not usually available for student-athletes this summer, studying abroad through the South Africa for Student-Athletes program.

"You see a lot of kids that don't play sports who are able to go abroad, and you want to be

able to do that, but that's typically something that we aren't able to experience," Harrell said. "Being able to go to a place like Africa with fellow student-athletes was really awesome and eye-opening. That was a trip where I saw things that a lot of people in this world can't say they've been able to experience."

Looking to the future, Harrell could return for a fifth season with his final year of eligibility. It's a chance he said he'd be willing to take.

"I would love to have another year here, if I'm fortunate to be able to do that," he said. "Other than that, I'll just use my Notre Dame degree to the utmost benefit."

Harrell said he looks forward to the upcoming festivities of Senior Day, sharing in a home finale that has, as usual, come all too fast for this senior class.

"You come here as a freshman, and you think [Senior Day is] ages away. You don't even think about it," Harrell said. "All of a sudden, just like that, it's right here. So being able to do something that I've seen every single year here — obviously that's a very special thing, I'm looking forward to being able to experience that with my family in this last game."

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KATHRYNE ROBINSON | The Observer

Irish senior offensive lineman Mark Harrell, right, rushes to join in the celebration after a Notre Dame touchdown during the team's 62-27 victory over Massachusetts on Sept. 26 at Notre Dame Stadium.

SCOTT DALY | LS | DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS

Daly finds the complete experience at ND

By MICHAEL IVEY
Sports Writer

As a senior coming out of Downers Grove South High School in Illinois, Scott Daly had plenty of Division I football scholarship offers.

He was named the national high school long snapper of the year for 2011 after winning the inaugural Herbalife 24 Chris Rubio Award and was ranked the No. 1 long snapper in the nation for the class of 2012 by Scout.com. But Daly said making the decision to which school he wanted to attend was easy.

"Notre Dame had the whole package," the Downers Grove, Illinois, native said. "When you look at academics, athletics, being close to home and the whole family and spirituality aspect, it was just second to none when I was in my recruiting process. It was really the best choice. I wouldn't want to go anywhere but Notre Dame, and I'm happy with my choice, and I'm glad I got to have four incredible years here."

Daly started playing organized football when he was in fifth grade and when it was time for the team to find a long snapper, they turned to him.

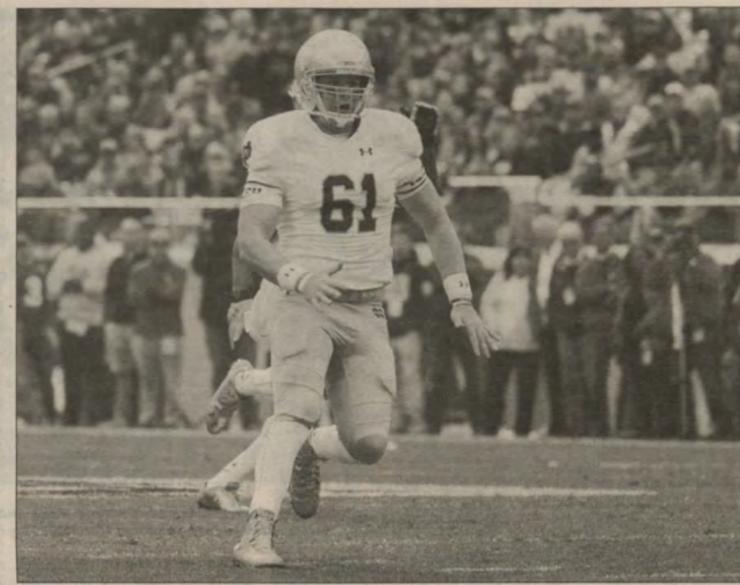
"Growing up, I was the only person that could do it," Daly said. "Starting in fifth grade when I first played football,

I was the only kid that could throw the ball back there half-way decent enough. I really didn't think much of it at first, but starting my sophomore year of high school, my sophomore coach came up to me and said, 'Hey, you have a raw talent, and you can play college football if you really wanted to.' So I started to go to some camps and met up with Chris Rubio, who is now my long-snapping instructor to this day and really turned me into the long snapper I am today. I owe everything to him. He really took my game to the next level and was a big part of me being able to long snap here."

Daly has been the starting long snapper for the Irish since 2013, and he said the job requires a considerable amount of mental toughness.

"It's like a golf swing," Daly said. "It's really muscle memory. Throughout when I started long snapping, I would watch a lot of film on guys who did it the right way and noticed that all of them did the same thing every single time. I kind of developed a little routine where, when I went out onto the field, it just second nature to me so I don't have to think too much except to just go out there and do what I do best and hopefully have great success while doing it."

It can be tough for a student



EMMET FARNAN | The Observer

Irish senior long snapper Scott Daly sprints downfield on punt coverage during Notre Dame's 42-30 win over Pittsburgh on Nov. 7 at Heinz Field. Daly has been snapping on punts and field goals for three seasons.

athlete to juggle his or her sports commitment with schoolwork, but Daly says it's similar to learning how to long snap.

"It's very tough," Daly said. "I think any Notre Dame student-athlete can attest to that when they're here at a fine academic institution like Notre

Dame but also being in an athletic program that holds you to the highest standards. It's very tough, especially freshman year coming in here and having to be very wise with time management."

"But as you go on, you definitely start to develop a routine in which you can juggle both athletics and school and be able to have success on and off the field."

The senior is enrolled in the Mendoza College of Business and is majoring in management consulting.

"It's a great major and something you can use in a lot of areas," Daly said. "I'm not exactly sure where I want to go after graduation, but I'm just trying to get my foot in the door and try to test some waters in the finance field and the medical field and just anywhere where I can have the most difference possible."

Growing up, in addition to playing football, Daly was also skilled in martial arts, earning a black belt in taekwondo. Daly says martial arts has helped him with his football career.

"It was just something I did growing up," Daly said. "My mom and my dad just got me into it and thought it would be something that would be a lot of fun to do. I really enjoyed it when I started in first grade and did it all the way for five or six years until I got my black belt in sixth grade. It was a great learning tool that allowed me to learn a lot about discipline and responsibility and that really transitioned to the football field in making sure I can do the little things and be professional on and off the field."

Daly says his favorite

football moment came during last year's bowl game, the 2014 Music City Bowl, when he snapped the ball for the game-winning field goal to help the Irish beat LSU, 31-28.

"Last year, being able to cap off a tough five-game stretch to go ahead and hike the game-winning field goal in the bowl game against LSU and to send the seniors off with a win after losing on senior day last year was definitely a great memory," he said.

Daly gives credit to Rubio as his biggest influence in his football career.

"In terms of football specifically, I would have to say my instructor Chris Rubio has helped me the most," Daly said. "He put me in such a great position to be looked at by Notre Dame as well as other schools during my recruiting process. Not only did he help me in the long snapping and football phase, but he also helped me become a better man. Just to do the little things and be professional on and off the field and I owe almost everything to him."

Daly will aim for the NFL after graduation, but if that doesn't work out, he has a few other career paths in mind.

"After graduation, I hope to try out for the NFL," Daly said. "It's definitely been a goal of mine since I got here my freshman year. If that doesn't work out, I have a Notre Dame degree that I can fall back on and take to whatever field I wish to. I'm not exactly sure which field I want to pursue but I would definitely want to do something in the business or medical field."

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SHELDON DAY | DL | INDIANAPOLIS

Day returns for final shot at championship

By DANIEL O'BOYLE
Sports Writer

Before his final home game for Notre Dame, senior defensive tackle Sheldon Day's main concern isn't the chance of the Irish making the College Football Playoff, or impressing NFL scouts that may be interested in him: he just wants to give his mother, Carol Boyd, a hug at the end of it all.

"She's been my biggest support system through the ups and downs," Day said. "Just to see her being able to run out and give her a big old hug in front of 81,000, it's going to be a special moment for her. I know she's going to enjoy it, and remember it and tell her grandkids and everything like that. It's definitely going to be a special moment for her."

"I know if I see my mom cry, it's going to make me cry. But I'm going to try to stay strong. There are a lot of emotions last time running out of that tunnel in front of 80,000-plus. It's going to be a great time and a great experience. Just kind of overwhelming a little bit, and just to know that I've done a lot of good things in my career here, and I'm just happy that I can have a senior night."

Day almost didn't have a Senior Day at Notre Dame. The highly-rated defensive lineman was expected by some to declare early for the 2015 NFL Draft, but he decided to come back for another year with the Irish instead. Day said the strength of the Irish team and the camaraderie among his teammates ensured he would return for one more year.

"The opportunity to play for a national championship, and



Observer File Photo

Irish senior defensive lineman Sheldon Day lays a hit on Navy senior quarterback Keenan Reynolds during Notre Dame's 49-39 victory over the Midshipmen on Nov. 1, 2014 at FedEx Field in Landover, Maryland. Day registered five tackles and one quarterback hurry in the win.

just being with those guys in the locker room, it's something many people regret," Day said about the prospect of leaving early. "If you do leave early, like the locker room experience, there is nothing like it, so I don't think many people can give that up."

Day said the process of deciding to stay early or return was not an easy one, but he said going through the decision with senior offensive tackle Ronnie Stanley, who was also a top prospect for the 2015 NFL Draft before also deciding to return for his senior season, helped make the decision easier for both players.

"We definitely shot some texts back and forth," Day said. "He told me that his decision rode on my decision, and I said that's too much pressure for me. 'Don't do that to me.' But we definitely

texted back and forth to see where we were and try to do things like that because we wouldn't be able to experience something like this: Just the guys in the locker room, and how much fun we're having this season, and just being around the guys, it's crazy that if we would have went the other way, how things would have been much different."

Day's final year has certainly been a successful one, and one that may make NFL scouts even more interested. The senior has collected three sacks this season, as well as a team-leading 11.5 tackles for loss — both are career highs for Day. He has also made 21 solo and 33 total tackles this season, which put him on course for career-highs, and has recorded a tackle for loss in seven of Notre Dame's eight outings this season. He also added the first forced fumble of his Notre Dame career when he sacked Temple's junior quarterback PJ Walker in the 24-21 win over the Owls on Oct. 31. Day said Notre Dame's strength and conditioning coach Paul Longo and defensive coordinator Brian VanGorder deserve most of the credit for his improved performances.

"Oh, man, coach Longo's done a great job," Day said. "You can see it in my play, and how [I've] changed since last year and how physical I've become and just my mentality going forth. Coach VanGorder's done a great job with my mental state. Coach Longo's done a great job with my physical state. So I felt like I changed a lot from last year to this year."

As a part of Notre Dame's class of 2016, Day has already played for a national title once, against Alabama in 2013 BCS National Championship. However, he said he still believes the senior class can deliver Notre Dame's first national championship in 27 years.

"Man, hopefully we're the class that everybody remembers

that puts Notre Dame back on top," Day said.

"Coming in as freshmen, that's all we could talk about, a national championship ... We didn't know how much it took to get there, but we're kind of learning a little bit about it right now. So it's definitely a blessing to kind of go through this experience."

In his second consecutive season as a team captain, Day has been a key leader on an Irish defensive line that has turned in some impressive performances this season. Day said he realized towards the end of training camp that the unit looked like a formidable one.

Day said he had a feeling that the team was going to be special one this year. "Then the later weeks of camp was just seeing how much we started to commit ourselves and see how serious we were about the learning of the game, and just seeing how much we were starting to dominate and seeing everything start to fall into place."

However, Day said being in a leadership role is a lot easier knowing he's surrounded by other capable leaders on defense.

"I'd definitely say we know our roles and when we need to step up," Day said. "If something's getting out of hand, we know one of the many leaders we have will step up."

Day said the team can rely on one person not on the roster for some extra support: his mother, who has shown her support for Day and his teammates at almost every home game of his career.

"My mom's pretty much a team mom," Day said. "She cooks for the team, she supports the team, and she's pretty much made every home game except for a couple ... She's definitely been the biggest support system and tried to support me in every way possible."

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EMMET FARNAN | The Observer

Irish senior defensive lineman Sheldon Day breaks off the line of scrimmage during Notre Dame's 42-30 victory over Pittsburgh on Saturday in Pittsburgh. Day finished with two tackles, including one for a loss.

MATTHIAS FARLEY | CB | CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Farley finds confidence as captain of Team 127

By KIT LOUGHRAN
Sports Writer

Not many would believe a Notre Dame football captain ever walked onto campus his freshman year lacking confidence.

Matthias Farley admitted it, though.

"I came into Notre Dame very moldable, shapeable and unsure of myself, questioning if I could cut it in school, cut it in football," Farley said.

It seems shocking the 5-foot-11, 210-pound graduate student cornerback was unsure of himself — especially on the field. But his five years at Notre Dame did the reassuring trick.

"Notre Dame challenged me day in and day out, on and off the field, and has pushed me to become an all-around better person who's a lot more confident in his abilities," Farley said.

Farley has certainly proven his abilities for the Irish since redshirting in 2011. He's accumulated 178 tackles and eight interceptions — not to mention almost 11,000 Twitter followers — between 2012 and Notre Dame's 42-30 victory over Pittsburgh last Saturday.

And Farley's impressive physical and leadership presence on the field earned him one of the acclaimed captain positions for "Team 127."

"It's definitely been one of the biggest, if not the biggest, honors of my life to lead this team and be somebody who guides the team, encourages the team in times that are

good and times that are bad," Farley said. "There's not that many captains in the history of Notre Dame, so it's definitely an honor to be part of that group and this 'Team 127.'"

"... I think it's a special team this year and a special group. It's been awesome to be a leader on this team."

Farley and his fellow four captains — graduate student center Nick Martin, graduate student linebacker Joe Schmidt, senior defensive lineman Sheldon Day and junior linebacker Jaylon Smith — make up the largest season-long captain group since 2007. These five and their team have dropped just one loss this season, a close 24-22 loss to No. 1 Clemson on Oct. 3. With no defeats since, they head into their last three regular season games against Wake Forest on Saturday, Boston College on Nov. 21 and No. 7 Stanford on Nov. 28 with a shot at the College Football Playoff.

"We're taking it one step at a time," Farley said. "We are in a good place right now. We're where we want to be as far as the season has been up to this point."

"But it's obviously not over. We've got a lot of work to do, and we've got three great opponents coming up, so we have to be on our 'A-game' because we know they're going to be on theirs. Not time to look to BC yet, not to look to Stanford; it's to really focus on Wake right now and to just make sure we're ready to play our best on Saturday."

Even Notre Dame's recent

No. 4 ranking in the College Football Playoff ranking hasn't phased Farley.

"It's cool and a very exciting thing, but I think everyone really understand that you don't get anything from being ranked four or one, two or three right now," he said. "It makes us that much more focused."

Defensively, Farley and the Irish have managed seven interceptions, including Farley's eighth career pick against Pitt.

"Just to get better [has been our goal defensively]," Farley said. "I think we've had long stretches in games where we've done really, really well and other times when there's a lack of focus by one or two people, and if we aren't focused and locked on each and every single play then big plays happen."

"I think it's an incredible group of guys that has all the talent in the world. We just have to stay focused for 60 minutes."

"Not 58," he laughed. With Senior Day this Saturday, Farley will have to stay focused for 60 minutes just one last time in Notre Dame Stadium.

"There's been a lot of great memories [at this stadium]," Farley said. "I'd say beating Michigan last year was really exciting ... and Stanford in 2012, singing the Alma Mater after every game, the student section has always been awesome, and running out of the tunnel is an awesome experience I will definitely miss."

"There's a lot of memories



EMMET FARNAN | The Observer

Irish graduate student cornerback Matthias Farley intercepts a pass during Notre Dame's 42-30 victory over Pittsburgh on Saturday.

— it's hard to pinpoint just one."

Reminiscing those memories — not to mention his career-high 49 all-purpose yards in that memorable 2012 Stanford game — and contemplating the NFL as an option after the season, brought Farley back what started it all: his decision to come to Notre Dame.

"It's been the greatest decision I've ever made," Farley said. "I wish I were able to go back and be a freshman all over again and do it all again. It's changed me as a person for the better, and it's going to be something that I miss every day when I leave."

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ANNMARIE SOLLER | The Observer

Irish graduate student cornerback Matthias Farley watches a ball fall just beyond his grasp during Notre Dame's 42-30 victory over Pittsburgh. Farley registered a team-high seven tackles in the game, which pushed his season total to 29, ninth on the Irish defense. He also picked up his first interception of the year during the game and has forced one fumble.

JARRETT GRACE | LB | CINCINNATI

Grace rebounds, returns to field against odds

By DANIEL O'BOYLE
Sports Writer

For many Notre Dame football players, the first game they play for the Irish will be the greatest memory of their college careers. But for graduate student linebacker Jarrett Grace — who missed a year and a half of action with a broken leg suffered in the 2013 season — it was all about his second “first game”: his first time back from two surgeries.

Grace had made the starting middle linebacker position his own for the Irish, replacing former All-American Manti Te'o and leading the team with 40 tackles in the opening six games. But then came the moment that was almost his last on the field for Notre Dame: an Arizona State lineman landed on Grace's leg and fractured his tibia. Grace said he knew he needed to do whatever it took to return from the injury.

“That injury definitely was an eye-opening experience,” Grace said. “To be honest, it sucked. I think that anybody will tell you that getting hurt sucks, but you have to draw the positives out of it, and for me personally, it gives me some time to reflect and figure out what's really important in my life. It gave me some time to just sit back and watch how people interact, watch things from a different perspective. So when I was able to return, I was able to bring a new kind of passion. I didn't take anything for granted. Taking the field for the second time meant so much more to me.”

The injury was supposed to rule him out for the rest of the season, but it wasn't supposed to keep him for 2014, too. Recovery took longer than expected though, and the Cincinnati native found himself needing further surgery. The linebacker was forced to watch from the sidelines. Grace said he knew his injury was serious but had no idea it would see him miss so much time.

“I knew it was bad,” Grace said. “If something keeps me on the ground, then generally it's pretty bad. I wanted to try to walk it off, but that just clearly wasn't happening. The doctors tell you one thing, that in six months you'll be good and you'll start running again, but then it kind of lingers, and I could feel it inside my body. I could tell it wasn't right. Having to get that second surgery sucked, but I didn't

even expect that to be as much of a setback as it was.

“But things are going to happen the way they do. We don't really have control over everything. I'm just extremely grateful to even play again because there was a lot of doubt about that.”

“I'd like to say there wasn't any doubt, but there was. I kept it in the very backmost part of my brain. Because when I had to go get that second surgery, and then when everyone said I would be able to go through camp and that wasn't happening, it was a mental battle every single day. It was like, ‘Alright, Jarrett, if you think it's not going to happen, then it's not going to happen, so you've just got to attack it every single day.’ Then when I started making progress, I thought, ‘No, I'm not going to settle for not coming back, I need to come back. For myself and for everybody else, too.’”

After redshirting his freshman season, Grace made his debut for the Irish in the season opener at Aviva Stadium in Dublin in 2012. He said he'll never forget the first time he stepped onto the field in a Notre Dame uniform.

“The first time I stepped onto the field in Notre Dame was in Ireland,” Grace said. “That was definitely a unique experience. There was only one other team at that point that could say that. I guess just to represent the Irish and to run out the tunnel for the first time with 80,000 people surrounding you is incredible. I don't know what kind of adrenaline rushes other people get from doing other crazy things, but that to me is the ultimate adrenaline rush, it's the ultimate goosebump, bone-hilling exciting moment. It's ingrained in my memory.”

After a strong year on special teams for the Irish in 2012, who made it to the BCS Championship Game, and half a season as a starter in 2013, Grace suffered his injury. But despite all the doubt, he returned to practice and then to the field for the Irish for the 2015 season. Grace said his excitement on his first game back, when Texas visited Notre Dame Stadium, almost got the better of him.

“Playing against Texas, that was crazy,” Grace said. “I was so jacked up for that, even more than my first game. I actually pulled my hamstring in that game, I was so



Irish graduate student linebacker Jarrett Grace, far left, celebrates with junior receiver Torii Hunter Jr., center, after the Irish downed a punt at the one-yard line during Notre Dame's 62-27 win over UMass on Sept. 26.

excited. I was in great shape and hydrated and all of that, but I was so jacked up and excited to be back, I pulled my hammy. But it was a blast, it was a celebration on the field. Every single play, just celebrating my teammates. I'm eternally grateful to people for sticking with me, I'm thankful for God, just for being a rock for me when times were really dark.”

Grace's contribution in 2015 wasn't just occasional special teams plays, though. Against Navy, Irish head coach Brian

Kelly elected to bring in Grace at strongside linebacker for the second half, a change that coincided with Notre Dame shutting down the Midshipmen's triple-option attack.

“Playing versus Navy this year was an absolute blast because it was the first time I saw real action at linebacker in almost two years,” Grace said. “That was great for me, just because they trusted me, even though I had little experience—in fact I had zero experience at that spot really. Just two days before

the game I took some snaps at that spot. So for everyone to believe in me meant the world for me. After the game [defensive coordinator Brian] VanGorder told me he was really proud of me, and that meant the world because it kind of felt like I was back out there and able to contribute to the team in a real, tangible way again, and I didn't know if I'd ever have another chance to do that. That was huge.”

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Senior linebacker Jarrett Grace, middle, observes action from the sidelines in Notre Dame's 43-40 loss to Northwestern on Nov. 15.

CHASE HOUNSHELL | TE | KIRTLAND, OHIO

Hounshell's athleticism earns him fifth year

By BEN PADANILAM
Sports Writer

Not many players are given the opportunity to play on both sides of the field during their careers, but graduate student tight end Chase Hounshell was one of the players athletic and intelligent enough to do it.

Coming out of Lake Catholic High School in Mentor, Ohio, Hounshell was a standout lineman on both sides of the football. When he had the opportunity to decide where he wanted to continue his career, he originally chose to play for Urban Meyer at Florida.

However, after Meyer “retired,” he ultimately chose to come to Notre Dame as a defensive lineman.

“I ended up coming here for defensive end, which is what I wanted to play,” Hounshell said. “I felt like that was kind of my body type.”

As the Associated Press's co-Defensive Player of the Year in Ohio in 2010, Hounshell was one of many talented defensive linemen in the 2011 recruiting class for the Irish. Many people questioned why he decided to join a class that included the likes of Stephon Tuitt, Ishaq Williams and Aaron Lynch, but Hounshell said he had other

reasons that made Notre Dame the obvious choice for him.

“Number one [was] definitely the people,” Hounshell said. “I had visited Notre Dame probably four or five times, and every single time, you just meet new people, new teammates, new coaches [and] the parents of the current teammates. There's just something about Notre Dame that attracts great people.”

“Obviously I was looking at education, too. I knew I wanted to go into business, and Notre Dame has the No. 1 business school in the nation, so it was just kind of an easy choice.”

While he never served as a starter for the team during his freshman season, Hounshell continued to work hard and found his way into seven games for the Irish as a reserve, including a four-tackle game in a win over Air Force.

Then in the first game of his sophomore season, he suffered a shoulder injury that cost him the remainder of the season. His junior year was also lost to injury, and Hounshell said it was a difficult time for him.

“Yeah, that was definitely hard,” Hounshell said. “My family helped me out a bunch. Just talking to my family helped a lot. My twin sister played college basketball, and she got hurt, so I was talking to her about her injuries. My brother played football in college, and

he got hurt, so I talked to him [as well].

“Every single day, you go out to practice, and you can't practice, but you rehab. [Head football athletic trainer] Rob Hunt was phenomenal helping me rehab every single day.”

However, he was able to make the comeback his senior season and found his way into three games. His comeback culminated with an opportunity for extended playing time against USC, a game in which he recorded two tackles for the Irish.

With an extra year of eligibility available to him, Hounshell decided he wanted to make one last push to help the team in any way possible. After sitting down with Irish head coach Brian Kelly, he decided to return to the team, but this time as a block-first tight end. It was a transition that Hounshell was more than willing to make, but one that wasn't easy either.

“You definitely have to open up your eyes,” Hounshell said. “There's just a lot of technique and stuff you're so used to as a defensive lineman, so every time you come off the ball, you're just locking someone up and ripping out, but now it's the complete opposite. So it's just been like little baby steps, and I've been progressing and progressing.”

With a deep tight end group the Irish had this season, Hounshell

wasn't expected to see much playing time this year. But that hasn't bothered him, as he said he has no regrets as a member of the program.

“Coach VanGorder, used to say, ‘Have no regrets. Everything that's happened has happened for a reason, and be happy that it happened, learn from it, and move on,’” Hounshell said. “I really have no regrets about my time at Notre Dame, and I think it's worked out for the best.”

As the Irish continue to improve week after week and assert themselves as playoff contenders, Hounshell said the chemistry on this team is similar to what he experienced with the 2012 team that made the BCS Championship Game, which was one of his favorite memories as a member of the program.

“In 2012, when we had an undefeated season, there was just something different about that team,” Hounshell said. “You could always tell that that team just meshed real well together. Everyone was just best friends, and that was just something you looked back in hindsight and are like ‘Wow, what a great team and great people,’ and I feel that same chemistry in the locker room this year.”

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PATRICK MAZZA | DE | GLEN ELLYN, ILLINOIS

Family ties run deep between Mazza and ND

By ELIZABETH GREASON
Sports Writer

Attending Notre Dame was not a difficult decision for senior defensive lineman Patrick Mazza.

For him, Notre Dame is a family affair.

The Illinois native's parents and older sister all attended the University, so he grew up as an Irish fan. He said he has found Notre Dame's combination of strong academics and a historically powerful football program as perfect fit for him.

“I've pretty much always wanted to come here,” Mazza said. “It was a pretty easy decision. It's been pretty cool to be able to get a top-flight education, pursue what I want to do after college and at the same time be able to be a part of a top-flight program like this. It's been pretty cool. You don't have that kind of opportunity at most schools in the country.”

Mazza's ascent to the big stage has been anything but typical, however. For the first two years of his Notre Dame career, Mazza played inter-collegiate football for his dorm, Sorin College, before walking on to the varsity team last year. The path to the top has not always

been an easy one, but Mazza said it has been worthwhile.

“Being a walk-on presents certain challenges in terms of football,” he said. “But I accepted my role, and I fulfilled it to the best of my capabilities.”

Being a student-athlete at Notre Dame is not something Mazza said he takes lightly. The pre-med major has goals of ultimately going to medical school and becoming a physician, a dream he said has been just as long-standing as the one he had to attend Notre Dame.

“It's been a goal for a pretty long time now,” Mazza said. “My uncle was a trauma surgeon down in Galveston, [Texas,] and I've always looked up to him. I was definitely inspired by him.”

Being a student in one of the most demanding majors Notre Dame has to offer, as well as a varsity football player, has forced Mazza to learn to manage his time effectively and strive for balance, he said.

“It's definitely tough juggling being a pre-med major with football,” Mazza said. “You just get better at it as your career goes on, and you learn how to handle it. It has ended up working out pretty well.”

While Mazza has fulfilled

his role on the football team, he also entered Notre Dame with the goal of excelling in the classroom, a goal which he said he feels he has also achieved.

“I think I did pretty well,” he said. “I'm in good position to be where I want to be a year from now when I'm looking to go to medical school.”

Mazza's talents extend beyond the football field and the classroom, as well. The defensive lineman was also a member of Finnigan's, the defending champions of the annual Bookstore Basketball tournament, which Mazza said has been one of the highlights of his time at Notre Dame.

“Bookstore has always been something that I've looked forward to being a part of,” Mazza said. “I had always heard about the guys who played here back in the '80s, like the Tim Browns. It's definitely a pretty special thing, and to be able to advance to the final and then beat the three-time champs was a ton of fun. We had a big crowd there, and having the chance to play a sport that I'm not playing for the school was a good change of pace.”

Mazza said he has made the most of his time at Notre Dame and that his experience

and playing for a program like this, all wrapped up together in one college experience is pretty cool and unique.”

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ANNMARIE SOLLER | The Observer



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DEMON DEACONS PASSING

Wake Forest's quarterback situation has been up in the air this year, and not because the Demon Deacons have the luxury of choosing between two good options. Both sophomore John Wolford and freshman Kendall Hinton have thrown more interceptions than touchdowns, and the duo has thrown for just 10 scores in nine games this season.

Then again, the Demon Deacons average the same number of yards per game, 229.9, as Virginia, and the Irish secondary struggled in that one, ceding 289 yards and two scores to Cavaliers quarterback Matt Johns — he hasn't thrown for more since.

The Notre Dame secondary, however, has started to step up the last few outings to win games. They largely shut down one of college football's best playmakers, Pittsburgh receiver Tyler Boyd, a week ago, and they've stepped up with big interceptions as of late: KeiVarae Russell and Max Redfield hepled secure the USC win in the fourth quarter with interceptions, while Russell stepped up two weeks later to seal the Temple victory. And don't forget the importance of Matthias Farley's interception last week in keeping Pittsburgh at bay.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

DEMON DEACONS RUSHING

A quick look at the stats suggests an ugly picture for the Wake Forest ground game: they're a bottom-10 unit, averaging just 110 yards per game this season. Only one "Power Five" school is worse running the ball, and that's Mike Leach's Washington State squad. But unlike the Cougars, the Demon Deacons don't sling the ball around through the air.

If one wants to make Wake Forest's rushing statistics look any worse, just take out the 203 yards it gained in a September win over FCS foe Elon — it's averaging just 98.3 rushing yards per game against FBS teams.

While the Irish run defense hasn't been the greatest thing in the world, it's been good enough to see Notre Dame run off three straight wins over teams with six or more wins. It's hard to see it struggling with Wake Forest.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

DEMON DEACONS OFFENSIVE COACHING

Despite having an offense that doesn't rank particularly well anywhere, head coach Dave Clawson has kept Wake Forest's games close by instilling what Irish head coach Brian Kelly referred to as a "ball-control" offense. Three of their losses have been by single digits, and last time out, they lost 20-19 to a more-talented Louisville team.

However, the Irish faced a similar, more-talented opponent last week in Pittsburgh, and by getting significantly ahead, they pushed the Panthers out of the ability to shorten the game.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

DEMON DEACONS SPECIAL TEAMS

There's a fairly evident point of inflection in kicker Mike Weaver's game: on field goals attempts of 39 yards or fewer, he's pretty good, posting a 10-for-11 mark. But on field goal attempts of 40 yards or more, it's a different story; Weaver's just 1-for-5 with a long of 47. But give him credit for his field goal against Boston College — it won Wake Forest the game, 3-0.

The kickoff return game has been pitiful, averaging just 17.24 yards per return, seventh-worst in the nation, while the punt return unit is amongst the bottom 15 in college football.

On the flip though, the Demon Deacons have one of the best punting games in the country, averaging 41.2 net yards per punt. That's eighth in the nation, and four-year-starter Alex Kinal could make an impact if the Wake Forest defense can keep it close.

EDGE: EVEN

DEMON DEACONS SCHEDULE (3-6)

- Sept. 3 **Elon** (W 41-3)
- Sept. 12 **@ Syracuse** (L 30-17)
- Sept. 19 **@ Army** (W 17-14)
- Sept. 26 **Indiana** (L 31-24)
- Oct. 3 **Florida State** (L 24-16)
- Oct. 10 **@ Boston College** (W 3-0)
- Oct. 17 **@ North Carolina** (L 50-14)
- Oct. 24 **North Carolina State** (L 35-17)
- Oct. 30 **Louisville** (L 20-19)
- Nov. 14 **@ Notre Dame**
- Nov. 21 **@ Clemson**
- Nov. 28 **@ Duke**



Greg Hadley
Editor-in-Chief

In its bid to replicate the success of 2012, Notre Dame will play one of few teams it truly blew out during its run to the BCS National Championship.

Expect a similar result against Wake Forest this weekend. The Demon Deacons have not beaten any team with a winning record this year, and their pass defense, while respectable, will not be able to contain a surging DeShone Kizer. And the Irish running backs will have a walk in the park against the porous Wake Forest run defense, with or without C.J. Prosise.

On the other side of the ball, Notre Dame's defense may not match the 2012 unit, but it also isn't going to be all that tested by a team that ranks 116th in the nation in scoring offense.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 42, Wake Forest 10



Mary Green
Assistant Managing Editor

Last time Notre Dame faced Wake Forest, the 2012 Senior Day, the Irish came away with a 38-0 victory. This year's senior class should expect that same type of goodbye.

The Irish are really clicking at this point in the season and gaining recognition for it, as the latest College Football Playoff rankings showed, and the Demon Deacons won't be able to slow them down.

The most uncertain things about this game is whether it'll be the last at Notre Dame Stadium for Jaylon Smith and Will Fuller and if the senior students in the stands run out of marshmallows before halftime.

Otherwise, it'll be as ideal a sendoff as imaginable for a senior class that — using this phrase for old time's sake — helped return Notre Dame to relevance.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 42, Wake Forest 7



Zach Klonsinski
Sports Editor

Last week, I went the route of Notre Dame controlling the game against Pittsburgh and winning by more than one score for only the second time in their last 11 matchups — and it worked.

So I've got to go with my gut and once again cut against the grain, except this time the other way: Notre Dame is going to give up more points than it should against a Wake Forest offense that finds itself somewhere between "dismal" and "floundering."

Not that it's going to matter, though.

The Irish rushing attack will drive through the Demon Deacons defense regardless of who is carrying the ball: Prosise, Adams or Kizer. That's just going to open the play-action game for that guy named Will Fuller.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 45, Wake Forest 21

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- (r-Fr.) **Cortez Lewis** 15 WR (Fr.) Johnathan Williams 81
- (Fr.) **Tabari Hines** 6 WR (Fr.) Chuck Wade 89
- (r-Fr.) **Justin Herron** 26 LT (Fr.) Ryan Anderson 70
- (r-Fr.) **Tyler Hayworth** 20 LG (Fr.) Ryan Anderson 70
- (Fr.) **Josh Harris** 65 C (So.) A'Lique Terry 55
- (r-Sr.) **Dylan Intemann** 10 RG (Fr.) Patrick Ouerhage 68
- (r-Fr.) **Phil Haynes** 63 RT (Fr.) Dylan Intemann 63
- (R-So.) **Cam Sergine** 15 TE (So.) Devin Pike 41
- (Gr.) **KJ Brent** 90 WR (Fr.) Alex Bachman 87



- (Fr.) **Brad Watson** 25 LCB (So.) Thomas Dillon 37
- (r-Sr.) **Brandon Chubb** 40 BLB (So.) Jabore Williams 39
- (r-So.) **Wendell Dunn** 24 DLB (Fr.) Chris Callahan 21
- (r-Fr.) **Josh Banks** 40 DT (Fr.) Willie Yarbary 92
- (Fr.) **Marquel Lee** 35 MLB (So.) Grant Dawson 50
- (r-Jr.) **Ryan Janvion** 2 WS (Fr.) Cameron Glenn 2
- (Gr.) **Zach Dancel** 10 SLB (Fr.) Thomas Brown 28
- (r-So.) **Duke Ejiofor** 59 DE (Fr.) Chris Stewart 99
- (Fr.) **Dionte Austin** 10 RCB (Gr.) Devin Gaudin 3



- (r-So.) **Mike Weaver** 10 PK (Fr.) Ben Brown 97
- (r-Sr.) **Alex Kinal** 10 H (Fr.) Steve Donatelli 17
- (r-Sr.) **Chuck Wade** 60 KR (Fr.) Matt Colburn 22
- (Fr.) **Garrett Wilson** 15 LS (Fr.) Steve Donatelli 17

- RCB **KeiVarae Russell** (Sr.) 12 Devin Butler (Jr.)
- WLB **Jaylon Smith** (Fr.) 4 Trevon Coney (Fr.)
- DE **Romeo Okwara** (Sr.) 98 Andrew Trumbetti (So.)
- DT **Sheldon Day** (Sr.) 93 Jay Hayes (So.)
- DT **Daniel Cage** (So.) 99 Jerry Tillery (Fr.)
- DE **Isaac Rochell** (Jr.) 55 Jonathan Bommer (So.)
- SLB **James Onwualu** (Jr.) 48 Greer Martin (So.)
- LCB **Cole Luke** (Fr.) 24 Nick Coleman (Fr.)

- WR **Will Fuller** (Jr.) 85 Equanimeous St. Brown (Jr.)
- TE **Tyler Luatua** (So.) 10 Alize Jones (Fr.)
- RT **Mike McGlinchey** (Jr.) 75 Mark Harrell (Sr.)
- RG **Steve Elmer** (Jr.) 80 John Montelus (Fr.)
- C **Nick Martin** (Gr.) 53 Sam Mastipier (So.)
- LG **Quenton Nelson** (So.) 62 Colin McGovern (Jr.)
- LT **Ronnie Stanley** (Sr.) 79 Hunter Brien (Jr.)
- WR **Amir Carlisle** (Sr.) 16 Torii Hunter Jr. (Jr.)
- WR **Chris Brown** (Sr.) 98 Coney Robinson (Fr.)

- H **DeShone Kizer** (So.) 4 Montgomery VanGorder (So.)
- KR **C.J. Sanders** (Fr.) 3 Amir Carlisle (Gr.)
- LS **Scott Daly** (Sr.) 99 Hunter Smith (Sr.)
- PK **Justin Yoon** (Fr.) 43 John Cheson (Jr.)
- P **Tyler Newsome** (So.) 42 Jeff Riney (Fr.)
- PR **C.J. Sanders** (Fr.) 7 Will Fuller (Jr.)



Alex Carson
Associate Sports Editor

The bookies in Las Vegas typically know what they're doing, and there's a reason Notre Dame opened as a 26.5-point Sunday over Wake Forest. On one sideline, you've got a team ranked No. 4 in the College Football Playoff rankings, and on the other, one that hasn't scored more than 19 points since September.

This is a classic case where there's a vast talent gap between two teams, and as such, a focused performance from Notre Dame should see this game wrapped up midway through the third quarter. And with Saturday's game being the last in Notre Dame Stadium for a slew of influential seniors, I see a good outing.

Wake Forest covers the spread, but only through the back door.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 37, Wake Forest 14



Brian Plamondon
Sports Writer

Notre Dame's defense hasn't allowed fewer than 20 points since its season-opening victory over Texas. Things could change this week, however.

Wake Forest's offense is abysmal, scoring only 18 points per game, good for 119th in the country. What makes matters worse is that the Demon Deacons can't even decide on a quarterback, rotating sophomore John Wolford and freshman Kendall Hinton in the middle of games.

Although the Irish should be wary of a trap game when they are sitting at number four in the most recent College Football Playoff rankings, this is not one. The Irish should take care of the Demon Deacons on both sides of the ball on Senior Day, allowing them to play their reserves by the fourth quarter.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 41, Wake Forest 15



EMMET FARNAN | The Observer



EMMET FARNAN | The Observer



IRISH PASSING

If there were any lingering questions about DeShone Kizer's ability, he likely answered them a week ago at Pittsburgh, throwing for 262 yards and five touchdowns as the Irish hung 42 on the Panthers. Will Fuller caught three of those touchdowns, running his season total to 12 — only three players have bettered him this year in that department.

Statistically speaking, the Demon Deacons defense has been one of the better in college football this year, conceding just 184.2 yards per game, but opponents have thrown on the Demon Deacons just 222 times, second-fewest in the country.

But Pitt's defense entered last Saturday's matchup with the Irish holding similar statistics, and Notre Dame torched the Panthers secondary.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH RUSHING

When C.J. Prosise went down at the end of the first quarter last week, there may have been reason for concern about the ground game. Prosise was coming off a weak performance at Temple, and Notre Dame was going to have to turn to a freshman, Josh Adams, to take the carries the rest of the way.

He responded with a 147-yard performance that reaffirmed the strength of Notre Dame's rushing game when the offensive line is on top of its game. The Irish have a top-20 rushing attack on the year and have only struggled to run the ball twice this year — against their two best opponents.

That should not be an issue this week: Wake Forest's rushing defense is outside the top 50, paving the way for the Irish line to rule the day.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

It took three plays for Notre Dame to take the lead at Pittsburgh last week, and after scoring to go ahead 14-3, the Irish never saw their lead shrink to single digits. DeShone Kizer and Will Fuller connected for three scores despite Kizer overthrowing the junior receiver on two occasions: The game plan was inches away from

looking even better. More important than Kizer's ability to go deep may be having the right timing to do it — and the Irish certainly did that against the Panthers.

The Pitt win marked a third straight game in which the Irish scored on their opening drive, and while the Wake Forest defense has looked solid on the whole, it's struggled with higher-octane attacks.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

After a rough game at Temple, Tyler Newsome recovered last week in a big way, booting three punts that went for more than 50 yards. When he's been on his game, he's been a real weapon for the Irish, and he showed that against Pitt, helping Notre Dame gain 20 yards on an exchange of punts.

There wasn't too much in the return game against the Panthers, but with the way the offense was playing, there didn't need to be. C.J. Sanders made good decisions on when to, and when not to, bring kickoffs out of the end zone — and Notre Dame's punt-block touchdown against USC shouldn't be forgotten. This has been the best Irish return game in the Brian Kelly era.

After some early-season struggles, Justin Yoon has settled down recently, calming concerns with another perfect outing against Pitt, though he didn't attempt a field goal. His 52-yard field goal against Navy showed his range and justified Brian Kelly's faith in his freshman kicker.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH SCHEDULE (8-1)

- Sept. 5 **Texas** (W 38-3)
- Sept. 12 **@ Virginia** (W 34-27)
- Sept. 19 **Georgia Tech** (W 30-22)
- Sept. 26 **Massachusetts** (W 62-27)
- Oct. 3 **@ Clemson** (L 24-22)
- Oct. 10 **Navy** (W 41-24)
- Oct. 17 **USC** (W 41-31)
- Oct. 31 **@ Temple** (W 24-20)
- Nov. 7 **@ Pittsburgh** (W 42-30)
- Nov. 14 **Wake Forest**
- Nov. 21 **vs. Boston College**
- Nov. 28 **@ Stanford**

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



JARRON JONES | DL | ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

Jones overcomes personal challenges

By MANNY DE JESUS
Sports Writer

Maturity. It's a difficult concept to wrap one's head around. There's a uniqueness behind how each person reaches it, and there isn't always a correlation between age and maturity, as most would like to think.

Not everyone grows at the same rate. Most people go through distinct obstacles that help push them to become mature individuals. Others may just naturally grow into their "coming-of-age."

In senior defensive lineman Jarron Jones' case, he said he believes his up-and-down career at Notre Dame has made him the best version of himself he could possibly be.

Last season, Jones tallied 40 tackles with seven and a half of them being tackles for a loss before being lost for the season with a foot injury. He missed the defeat to USC in the regular-season finale and the Irish victory over LSU in the Music City Bowl.

Heading into this season, Jones was placed on the Lombardi Trophy preseason watch list, which is given out to the best defensive offensive or defensive in the country. Primed to make his comeback on a defense that returned 10 of 11 starters, Jones suffered yet another setback. It was announced Aug. 15 Jones had torn his MCL during fall camp and would sit out the entire season.

"That was probably the most heart-breaking moment," Jones said quietly. "Tearing my knee has been my biggest fear. I've seen so many other people go through it, and it's just such a long recovery process. ... I was scared to death when I found that out because I knew I wasn't going to play all year."

Tearing his MCL was the culmination of all the obstacles Jones has endured four years into his tenure at Notre Dame. Before even arriving to campus, the Rochester, New York, native had to make life-changing decisions that would guide his path towards becoming who he is today.

In April of 2011, Jones said he gave a verbal commitment to Penn State based solely on one thing: "I chose Penn State strictly on party reasons. I was very immature during the recruiting process," Jones said. "In wake of my senior year, I realized that I had to make bigger decisions in my life. I was looking at myself at Penn State, and I didn't see myself being the best I could be. I took my visit to Notre Dame, and that's when I saw myself being the best I could possibly be."

Before started his senior season at Aquinas Institute, Jones decommitted from the Nitany Lions and decided Notre Dame would be best. He said he

understood making the commitment to go to a school for four years was a decision that shouldn't be based on just how fun it might be but rather the life track the institution would put him on.

Despite being rated as the second-best player in the state of New York coming out of high school, according to Rivals.com, Jones said his senior year did not go as well as he envisioned it.

"I didn't have the season that I wanted my senior year," Jones said. "I didn't play up to the expectations that I put on myself and that everyone put on me. I kind of had to deal with the downside of recruiting. I was a five star in like every site, and at least top 20 overall, and after senior year, I dropped tremendously. I had to deal with that, and that's when I had to use the [U.S. Army All-American Bowl] to prove myself."

On every play, every mistake, every penalty called on him and every sack, someone was watching Jones and evaluating his potential. Was he going to be an impact player coming out of high school, or had his ceiling been reached in high school? The pressure of having to play like the best player in New York and knowing he was being dissected on every play made it difficult for Jones to play up to his standards, he said.

But he also said handling that pressure was just another step into becoming a better version of himself.

"It was part of growing up," Jones said.

Once he arrived to campus in 2012, Jones said he accepted being redshirted and practiced with no intention to win a starting job on purpose. He struggled with becoming accustomed to his new life 500 miles away from

his home, but he said he knows his struggles were just the next step in the process.

"I spent the whole year just growing up," Jones said. "I was actually supposed to play, and the thing was, I chose to practice in a lackadaisical manner on purpose because I felt like a redshirt was better for me, but then looking back on it, maybe I should not have taken that redshirt."

Despite not playing, Jones said he learned a tremendous amount from the players who played during Notre Dame's run to the 2013 BCS Championship Game. He took the lessons learned and implemented them into his own style of play, which eventually earned him playing time the next season.

Jones played in 12 games and started against Stanford later in the season. He tallied 20 tackles, a forced fumble, one sack and two blocked kicks, one of which was a game-changing block in Notre Dame's 23-13 win over BYU. His successful sophomore campaign led him to the starting rotation the following year.

The foot injury against Louisville last season gave Jones yet another opportunity to mature. It was the first injury he had ever sustained, and while most players would have let the injury get the best of them, Jones said he knew he needed to overcome the obstacle to reach his pinnacle as a player.

"It was just something that I had to learn to do on my own," Jones said. "I just had to learn how to stay positive through it all. ... I felt like I had to start all over because freshman year I was watching games. ... Once junior year came around, I felt like there was no looking back."

Eleven games since his last snap, Jones is recovering from



MICHAEL YU | The Observer

Irish senior defensive lineman Jarron Jones looks to the sideline during Notre Dame's 48-17 win over Rice on Aug. 30, 2014.

his knee injury with his eyes set on making a return for Notre Dame's bowl game. Sitting at 8-1 and still in contention for a spot in the second annual College Football Playoff, Jones said he thinks there's a chance he could make his return to the field in late December or early January.

"After surgery, things weren't as bad as we thought," Jones said. "We're trying to shoot for the bowl game. There's a chance — I'm not making any promises — but I'm trying not to push it. It's hard not to push it because you want to get back and play ...

but you can't just get back and play."

Jones said he has also learned to be patient and understanding while being a mentor to freshman Jerry Tillery and sophomore Daniel Cage, who are both filling in for Jones in his absence along the defensive line.

With his mind set on making a comeback for the postseason, Jones said he is prepared to take everything he has learned with him back to the field this year.

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INSIDER

INSIDER

NICK MARTIN | OL | INDIANAPOLIS

Martin becomes anchor of Irish offensive line

By GREG HADLEY
Editor-in-Chief

Editor's Note: A version of this article originally appeared in the Oct. 9 edition of *The Observer*.

Nick Martin: the centerpiece of Notre Dame's offense.

Not sophomore quarterback DeShone Kizer, not junior receiver Will Fuller, not even senior running back C.J. Prosise. It's graduate student center and captain Nick Martin that propels the Irish attack forward.

That's not Martin's opinion. It's what his teammates say.

"He's the guy that makes it go," Prosise said of Martin. "Without him, we couldn't have a well-oiled machine like we do. And just his leadership on the field and what he does for our team has been amazing."

As Martin goes, so does Notre Dame's offensive line. And as the O-line goes, so does the Irish offense. Through the first four games of the year, the front five dominated, opening up massive holes for Prosise to run through for 600 yards and six rushing touchdowns and protecting the quarterback to the tune of just five sacks.

With Martin at center and senior Ronnie Stanley at left tackle, the Irish line features what many pundits consider future NFL talent. Add that to one of the best rushing games in the country, and Notre Dame seemed primed to ride the run all season long.

"As an [offensive] lineman we love to run the ball," Martin said Sept. 30. "We like when we have success. Going back to our



MICHAEL YU | The Observer

Irish graduate student center and captain Nick Martin prepares to snap the ball to junior quarterback Malik Zaire during Notre Dame's 38-3 win over Texas on Sept. 5. Along with senior defensive lineman Sheldon Day, Martin became a two-time captain this year.

running backs, the way they run ... it's unbelievable. Up front, we work our butts off to try and make holes and do our best."

Then came the Oct. 3 game against Clemson. In the pouring rain, Martin and the line struggled, allowing four sacks and five other tackles for loss in a 24-22 defeat to the Tigers. Prosise had 50 yards on 15 attempts and was hit at or before the line of scrimmage on 44 percent of his touches, according to ESPN.

Prosise did not blame the line for Notre Dame's rushing struggles, and Martin said the Irish were bound to experience a setback at some point.

"I can never say our O-line did a bad job in that game. They did everything they could. When

you're running the ball and there's a safety in the hole that I'm running to every time, it's hard to block that guy. They're not accounting for that guy, there's only five of them," Prosise said.

"We played this game a long time, and you know you're not going to be able to rush for 200 yards every game, that's not reality," Martin said.

After the game, Martin's fellow graduate student and captain Joe Schmidt said no one on Notre Dame would smile for the next week. On Oct. 7, the linebacker said he was still "livid" over the loss.

Martin was also upset after the loss, saying the Irish were "too good of a team to come down and lose this game."

But by Oct. 6, he said, he had turned his focus to Navy, refusing to let the defeat bother him anymore.

"Yeah, anger, you know," Martin said of his emotions following the game. "It was definitely not easy to lose. But you win a game, you lose a game. You sit down, watch the film, learn from mistakes. Go on and get ready for Navy."

"[I] definitely have a chip on the shoulder. But I put it to rest after Monday."

That determination to move on is key to Martin's leadership style, he said. After five years at Notre Dame, three starting and two as a captain, he has learned to stay level-headed and consistent for his teammates.

"I always look to give the same every day. Whether it's adversity [or] good times, people have to be able to rely on you to be that same guy," Martin said. "I try to be the same guy every day."

Toiling away, Martin has been about as consistent as anybody else on the line this season so far. And that makes him invisible to most fans. Almost always, the only time an offensive lineman's name is spoken during the game is when he is called for a penalty.

So far, Martin has been flagged just twice this year, both for false starts.

But that anonymity doesn't mean Martin's teammates don't recognize his consistent play in the trenches.

"He's always the same, he's always out there, the same leader, the same guy every day," Prosise said. "He's always encouraging, he's always motivating. It's great to have him as the leader of our offense because we can always look to him to be positive and look to him for that leadership. He's an amazing guy, and I'm glad that's the guy I get to run behind every day."

That consistency has helped to put Martin in a small circle of two-time captains for Notre Dame. He and senior defensive lineman Sheldon Day joined that group at the beginning of this season, bringing the total to 21 in program history.

"[It's a] very special sense of pride," Martin said of the honor. "It's probably one of those things that won't hit you until you leave. Just to represent all those people that came before you, I think, is the biggest thing. You look up on the wall, and you see all those amazing people that came before you, and you represent them."

One of those people who came before Martin is his older brother, Zack. Another two-time captain, Zack Martin last suited up for the Irish in 2013 and has since become an All-Pro lineman with the Dallas Cowboys.

By watching and playing alongside Zack, Nick grew into his own as a leader, he said. He also developed an appreciation for the consistency of Notre Dame's offensive line — not only from week to week, but over the span of years.

"It's about the people that come before you," Martin said Sept. 30. "The O-lines, having guys like Chris Watt, Zack Martin, Christian Lombard, those guys, and even before that, the O-line

at Notre Dame, especially in the '90s and ever since then, has always been a sense of pride, and we just try to carry that on."

Carrying on meant weathering a positional shuffle in 2014 after three games, as Martin transitioned from center to left guard. Then, in spring practice this year, he went back to center, even as question of to whom he would snap the ball — Everett Golson or junior Malik Zaire — remained up in the air.

For the most part, Martin and the offensive line has been spared the injury bug that overtook Notre Dame early this season. But they did have to deal with big changes in personnel around them, as Prosise and Kizer took over in the backfield. Still, Martin emphasized consistency when it came to adapting to those changes.

"It's business as usual. We like to keep things the same up front, we have to prepare the same way, and we gotta play the same way. Doesn't matter who's behind us," Martin said after Kizer took over for the injured Zaire.

Keeping the offensive line humming along is not much of a challenge for Martin. Dating back to the days of his brother, the unit has always been close-knit on and off the field, and as a leader last year, he spent time talking about life outside football.

But as the only offensive captain this season, Martin has expanded his role in that regard to include other position groups. His consistency and skill on the field, though, are not quite the same in the other pastimes he shares with his teammates.

"I'm not a big video game guy," Martin said. " ... I don't even know why I'm telling you this, but we had a league, [and] Will Fuller literally beat me by about 100 points in Madden. So that explains to you how bad I am."

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Martin approaches the line of scrimmage during Notre Dame's 30-22 win over Georgia Tech on Sept. 19 at Notre Dame Stadium.

EAMON MCSOSKER | S | SAN PEDRO, CALIFORNIA

McOsker cherishes rivalry wins over USC

By KIT LOUGHRAN
Sports Writer

Committed to play for Pennsylvania, this Southern California native ultimately re-found his way to Notre Dame and his Irish roots.

Senior safety Eamon McOsker knew a thing or two about Notre Dame — with his dad, sister and brother all Domers — when he decided to retract his decision to play for the Quakers and instead join the Irish roster as a preferred walk-on.

"My dad went here so growing up I was always a Notre Dame fan," McOsker said. "I grew up watching Notre Dame football on Saturday mornings, and then in high school, I started looking around at other schools, including some of the Ivy leagues and D-I programs.

"Then I visited here. I re-fell in love with the place and decided to come. It's been a great experience."

And a very well-rounded experience at that.

"Everything [about Notre Dame] has been most memorable," McOsker said. "This school is great — the people, faculty, the coaches are all great. I love Notre Dame."

"Go Irish," he spiritedly added. But when it comes to game time, there's one Rudy-esque moment that stands out for the 5-foot-11.5, 205-pound safety.

"There's nothing like running out of the locker room and tunnel on Saturdays," McOsker said. "It's a unique, awesome experience."

"I still remember my first time freshman year running out of the tunnel. I got chills down my spine."

That same chill-sending feeling especially struck McOsker his freshman year when the Irish went 12-0 to make it to the BCS Championship Game, eventually falling 42-14 to Alabama on Jan. 7, 2013.

"That whole freshman year, national championship season was great," McOsker said. "The national championship itself was an awesome experience."

"Up until about a couple minutes into the first quarter," he added with a laugh.

And it's no surprise the San Pedro, California, native and Loyola Academy alum would revel in having the chance to take on his local rival, USC. During his Notre Dame career, McOsker and the Irish have fared 3-1 against the Trojans. The Irish won, 22-13, in 2012 to get the national

championship nod and won the following season, 14-10. The Trojans crushed the Irish, 49-14, last year. But, luckily for McOsker, he ended on a 41-31 victory over USC at home Oct. 17.

"Beating USC, especially this year, has definitely stood out to me," McOsker said. "Being from Southern California and after that whooping we had last year, it was nice to have a great performance, with both sides of the ball playing well."

McOsker said he's pleased with the work the defense has put in this year as the team chases a berth in the College Football Playoff.

"We've been working on being a more consistent defense," McOsker said. "We had times when we played really well and when we haven't played that great, so the goal this year has been to get everyone on the same page to play the highest level for four quarters."

"... We're another year smarter in our defensive scheme. We have some playmakers on the offense, everyone on the team gets along, and we have a really special, unique bond, which is important in reaching the national championship. We're playing well and finishing our games."



MARY MCGRAW | The Observer

Irish senior safety Eamon McOsker prepares for a play during the Blue-Gold Game on April 18 at LaBar Practice Complex.

After his senior year comes to an end, the finance major will be tackling his next competition on a different field than Notre Dame Stadium — the job search in the business world.

"I'm trying to figure out my plans for next year, but hopefully, I'll be back in Los Angeles," McOsker said. "I've been looking

into a lot of different sectors in finance.

"Senior year has been busy, and school and football are challenging — but they're helping me get ready for the next chapter of my life."

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ROMEO OKWARA | DL | CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Multi-faceted Okwara prospers on defensive line

By RENEE GRIFFIN
Sports Writer

Where to start with Romeo Okwara?

With the fact that the 6-foot-4, 270-pound senior starter on the defensive line leads the team in sacks, racking up six already this season?

Or that he came to Notre Dame as a 17-year-old and will graduate with a degree in accounting from the Mendoza College of Business at the age of 20?

Or that he moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, from Nigeria when he was in middle school?

Or that he and junior receiver Corey Robinson were featured in an episode of Showtime's "A Season with Notre Dame Football" for their ukulele playing?

The answer is that no matter where you start, Okwara is anything but average.

Heading into Senior Day against Wake Forest, he is coming off two of the most productive games of his career: a seven-tackle, one-sack performance against Temple and a four-tackle, two-sack showing against Pittsburgh.

Irish head coach Brian Kelly said Tuesday that Okwara is "playing his best football" right now. Kelly also said the lineman will only get better from here.

"When he stepped on campus, he was 17 years old," Kelly said. "So as we continue to talk to NFL scouts, we tell them,

"Look, you're just getting a kid who is just learning how to play the game."

"[We're seeing] the maturation of a kid that's kept his

weight for the first time. ... [He is] understanding the game, the maturation of that, physically maturing, keeping his weight on."

While Kelly was optimistic about the prospects of Okwara improving as an individual, Okwara focused on the line's potential as a whole after the win over Pittsburgh.

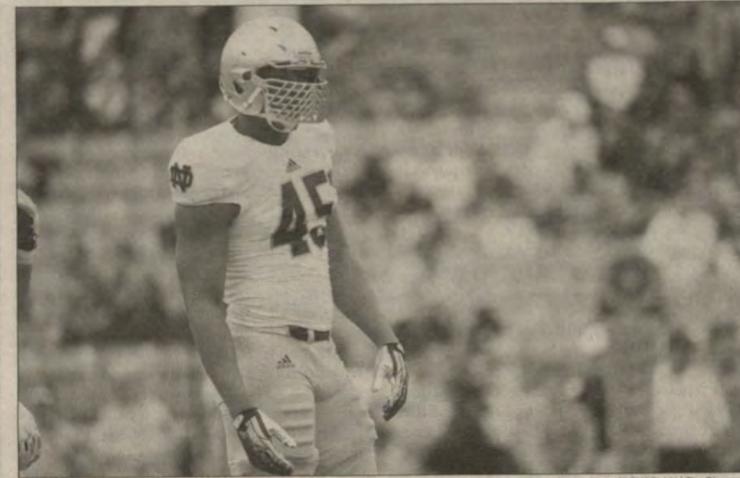
"We had a solid performance, but there is always room to grow," Okwara said. "We have to keep getting better each and every day and keep practicing hard."

Okwara has come a long way since he was cut from his eighth-grade football team just a few years after moving to the United States. The next year, he made the team at Ardrey Kell High School in Charlotte, North Carolina, and never looked back.

"It was kind of surreal when I started getting offers. I got my first offer from Duke, and the coach called me, and I didn't really know how to handle that," Okwara said Sept. 23. "I wasn't expecting it. I started practicing a lot harder, and knowing that, I had to be a lot better."

Upon arrival at Notre Dame, Okwara was younger than the other freshmen, but said the veterans from his area and the leaders at the linebacker position — including Manti Te'o and Carlo Calabrese, among others — helped him adjust to the college environment.

"My freshman year here, we had [former linebacker] Prince [Shembo] here who's from Charlotte, we had [graduate student safety] Matthias [Farley] here who's from



MICHAEL YU | The Observer

Senior defensive lineman Romeo Okwara readies for a snap during the Blue-Gold Game on April 12, 2014. Okwara started his career as a linebacker but switched to the defensive line last season.

Charlotte and [offensive lineman] Mark Harrell was also from Charlotte," Okwara said Sept. 23. "I had that base, and I knew some of the older guys who were here, so I always felt very comfortable being here."

Following a freshman year that primarily consisted of special teams work, Okwara played wherever he was needed on the defense as a sophomore, ranging from defensive end to drop linebacker behind Jaylon Smith.

His junior year was a different story: He started 12 of 13 games on the defensive line, finishing the year with 39 tackles, two forced fumbles and a team-high four sacks.

Then as a senior, Okwara was suddenly one of the more

experienced veterans on the line, as fellow senior lineman Jarron Jones went down with a torn MCL, leaving freshman Jerry Tillery and sophomore Daniel Cage to fill the hole.

"It's very devastating when any of our teammates go down, but we knew the next guy had to step up," Okwara said on Sept. 23. "We've all been that young guy coming in, so we know that being there for them is very important."

Okwara credited senior Sheldon Day with filling the leadership role and helping the newer players know what was expected of them.

"Being a young guy, you see the older guys act a certain way, and you see them succeed, and that's something you want to

mimic," he said. Okwara also said he was glad to be right where he is: an integral part of Notre Dame's defensive line.

"I love the D-line," he said. "Put me anywhere, but I'm loving the D-line right now."

Saturday may be the last time Romeo Okwara takes the field at Notre Dame Stadium, but it won't be the last time an Okwara does so. His younger brother Julian, a four-star defensive end recruit according to Rivals.com, is committed to play at Notre Dame next fall.

Associate Sports Editor Alex Carson contributed to this story.

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NICK OSSELLO | S | WHEAT RIDGE, COLORADO

Ossello transitions from lacrosse to football

By BEN PADANILAM
Sports Writer

Playing football at Notre Dame is a dream for a lot of high school student-athletes. For graduate student safety Nick Ossello, however, that dream became a reality this season.

A midfielder for the Irish lacrosse team the last four seasons, Ossello was a standout player in both football and lacrosse at Wheat Ridge High School in Wheat Ridge,

Colorado, just west of Denver. Although he was recruited as a lacrosse player, he said he had always dreamed of playing football at the college level.

"I had wanted to be a football player my entire life, and after signing here to play lacrosse, I didn't think that I would ever get that opportunity," Ossello said. "Then, luckily enough, I was able to make the team."

With his collegiate lacrosse career over, Ossello learned of an

NCAA rule that allows graduate students to gain a fifth year of eligibility in a second sport. Having received all-state honors as a football player in high school, he decided to pursue that dream once again. After successfully walking on to the team, Ossello then began the difficult transition from lacrosse to football.

While the transition has certainly been rewarding, it has also had its challenges, Ossello said. Much like lacrosse, Ossello said the test of going up against elite college athletes — except now it is in a sport he has not played for four years — has been one of the most difficult parts of making the transition.

"Pretty much the challenge is just going up against incredible athletes every day," Ossello said. "While I'm very appreciative of that, it does absolutely have its challenges, both mentally and physically. [It has been] challenging but the most rewarding experience I've had in my life."

Fortunately, he has been blessed with the guidance of both coaches and players during the transition, Ossello said.

"The first coach that I became fairly close with here was Coach [Todd] Lyght, and he kind of helped me out in my transition," Ossello said of the Irish secondary coach. "I would be asking him some dumb rookie questions, and he would take the time to answer them and kind of helped me through the original transition from having a

lacrosse to a football mindset, and I was very appreciative of that.

"Matthias Farley [also] helped me out a lot. I knew him before coming into this year, and he was very helpful and just kind of helped me out with the transition."

All of that hard work culminated into one moment for Ossello: running out of the tunnel against Texas to take the field for the first time.

"The first time that I ran out on the field against Texas, particularly the tunnel, that was probably the most memorable moment of my life," Ossello said. "Running out of that tunnel was really just an incredible experience. I wish I had the words to describe what that meant to me and how that felt, but I haven't found them yet."

Since then, the experience has been the ride of a lifetime for him. Besides joking about getting a chance at being the starting quarterback, there isn't much that he would change about his time with the team, Ossello said.

"I unfortunately had a couple of minor injuries that set me back a little bit, but you kind of take what you have and work with what you have," Ossello said. "It was a very humbling experience, and I think I learned a lot. I will be very appreciative of that in the coming years."

Of all the experiences he has enjoyed and will continue to enjoy as the season goes on, Ossello said the camaraderie with his teammates will be what he misses the most

when it is all said and done.

"[I'll miss] the locker room and just kind of watching everybody interact and just making friends and seeing how everybody — whether you're having a bad day or whether you're having a good day — can come in and know that the guys on the team will be there to have your back and be there to cheer you up and help you get through a long day or make a good day even better," Ossello said. "So just being around the guys and seeing how happy, you know, just how much of a brotherhood it is really is something I'm gonna miss."

As he prepares for life after college, however, Ossello said he has several opportunities available to him and plans to give them all a try and see how it turns out.

"I'm going through the interview process with a couple companies right now, two financial ones and then a group purchasing organization," Ossello said. "I see myself wherever/whichever job offers me [or] whichever one makes the best offer."

"I was fortunate enough to be drafted by some professional lacrosse teams: the Denver Outlaws for outdoor and then the Georgia Swarm for indoor, so I'll give that a shot, see how that goes, and then hopefully I'll convince some poor woman to marry me and start a family and have a great time."

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EMILY MCCONVILLE | The Observer

Graduate student safety Nick Ossello, a former Irish lacrosse player, utilized an NCAA rule to walk onto the football team in his fifth year.



ZACH LLORENS | The Observer

Irish senior defensive lineman Romeo Okwara hurdles Temple junior quarterback P.J. Walker following a fumble in Notre Dame's 24-20 win over the Owls on Oct. 31 at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia. Okwara leads the Irish with six sacks this season and sits second on the team in tackles for loss, with 9.5.

C.J. PROSISE | RB | PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA

Prosise evolves into starting running back

By MARY GREEN
Assistant Managing Editor

Editor's Note: A version of this article originally appeared in the Sept. 11 edition of The Observer.

It all started with a dunk. When Irish head coach Brian Kelly was searching through his next crop of recruits in the high school class of 2012, he saw a feat of athleticism out of Woodberry Forest School in Virginia that had him eager to get C.J. Prosise in a Notre Dame uniform.

"I saw him dunking a basketball at his high school, and I saw this athlete, and I said, 'I don't know where he's going to play, but we've got to take him,'" Kelly said Tuesday. "He's just that good of an athlete. Loved his personality. Again, his make-up, great fit from a great school. We've just got to find a place for him to play."

Little did Prosise know back then — he admitted, in retrospect, he can't recall Kelly seeing him play basketball — but that dunk would have him leaving his home in Petersburg, Virginia, headed to Notre Dame for his freshman year as a safety.

Three years later, Prosise returns to Virginia with the Irish, but this time, he will line up in the backfield as the team's starting running back.

It's a chain of events Prosise said he couldn't have predicted when he first came to South Bend.

"You never know where you're going to be needed, and I've always just wanted to be here for my team, and I've wanted to do whatever I can to make my team be the best team in the country, so if that means I was at safety, linebacker, receiver, now running back, I'm just doing whatever I can to help the team," he said Wednesday.

His freshman year, Prosise practiced with the safeties wearing a No. 34 jersey, but he didn't see much of the playing field as

the Irish made their trip to the BCS Championship Game. The next year led to a new position and a new number — lining up with the receivers as No. 20 — because, Kelly said, "he wasn't a big hitter."

With a steady confidence a little quieter than that of some of his teammates, Prosise begged to differ.

"I would say I slightly disagree," he said with a grin. "I feel like I didn't get my chance to, you know, get in there and hit a little bit on defense, but all I'm saying is, I think that I'm a physical player, but we didn't really get to see it that much on defense, I guess."

It's not that Prosise wasn't a physical player as a safety, Kelly said. In fact, the head coach said that asset made the senior's transition across the line of scrimmage and then to the backfield a bit easier.

"He just plays the game fast and physical," Kelly said. "He doesn't think about it. So I just think that he's not afraid of contact. He's somebody that, whether he's running the ball or he's catching the ball, he's always played that fearless kind of game."

Prosise said he's always had the mentality that he wants to help the team win in any way possible, so he wasn't upset when he was moved after his freshman season, but it did take some adjusting.

"Moving [from defense to offense] at first is kind of like, you get a little skeptical because I'm not used to catching passes from a college quarterback, but once you kind of get into the groove and get used to it," he said. "... I don't know, I feel like I'd still be a good safety if I was still back there, but that's not how it worked out, but I'm happy where I'm at right now."

As a receiver his sophomore and junior years, he appeared in every game, making nine starts, and recorded 36 receptions for

588 yards — 516 of those in 2014 — and two touchdowns.

But last spring, his coaches told him he would be on the move again, this time to the running backs' room under first-year coach Autry Denson.

Kelly, Denson and his teammates praised the quickness and dexterity with which Prosise made the switch throughout the spring, and the new back showed those skills off at the team's Blue-Gold Game in April, collecting 64 yards on 12 carries, including a team-long 15-yard rush.

He continued that momentum into his second public appearance as a running back, but this time, it mattered a little more, in the Sept. 5 season opener against Texas.

With starting junior running back Tarean Folston going down in the first quarter with a torn ACL, Prosise had to step up and take the bulk of Notre Dame's carries. He showcased how naturally he seemed to have made the transition by tallying a game-high 98 yards on 20 rushes — a figure Kelly said he can maintain throughout the season.

However, Prosise admitted getting out of bed the next two mornings was more challenging than usual.

"I was sore, but you're going to be sore after a football game," he said. "That's just kind of how, kind of the life I chose, but I felt, for the most part, I felt good. I was hurting a little bit, but you've just got to move on, get in the ice tub, get treatment and get back on the field."

Teammates have different theories as to why Prosise was able to transition into the backfield without many visible growing pains. The week before the Texas game, Folston attributed it to his nature as "a freak athlete," while graduate student cornerback Matthias Farley said Sept. 9 it was his combination of speed and size, at 6-foot-1/2 and 220 pounds.



ZACH LLORENS | The Observer

Prosise looks downfield during Notre Dame's 24-20 win over Temple on Oct. 31 at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia.

"He doesn't really look that big," Farley said. "He walks around, he doesn't look that big, but when you see him in practice, you're like, you're a large individual."

"He's really, really shifty, which I don't think we got to see too much of when he was at wide receiver because he runs around, catch the ball. But now you get the ball in his hands early and be able to make plays and make people miss. Obviously, he's incredibly fast."

Though he was officially named the starting running back the week after the Texas game, ahead of true freshmen Josh Adams and Dexter Williams, Prosise still only has one actual game at the position under his belt. He said there's still more room for improvement, and he and his head coach agreed on where that needs to come.

"I think the fundamentals really of the position — stance, pocket for taking handoffs, the right steps," Kelly said. "I think really — why he's been able to move into the position that he is in is because of his physical ability, his maturity and understanding the offense. But it's certainly a work in progress as it related to the fundamentals."

"You're not seeing some of the things that I'm seeing fundamentally that need to continue to grow for him because they could end up hurting us down the road if we don't get better at them, and he knows that, too. So it's the work that we have to do every day in practice on the fundamentals of the position

that are really central to his development."

The next time he takes the field, he will do so in front of more familiar faces than usual — about 50, Prosise estimated, made up of family members and friends. Many of them will make the hour-and-a-half drive from Petersburg to Charlottesville to see the running back play in person for the first time in an Irish uniform.

"I'm going to be pumped up," he said. "I've actually been pumped up this whole week, so it's definitely going to be a great time."

However, he said he isn't naive enough to expect a friendly crowd on the road against an ACC opponent, which happens to be the first school that offered him a scholarship in high school.

"I might be going home, and I might be playing in front of a lot of family, but it's still going to be at Scott Stadium, and I know they're gonna be rowdy and ready for us to come in there and play them," he said.

With his friends and family watching him play in the blue and gold for the first time, much less the first time as a running back, Prosise himself will still be enjoying the new feelings that come from this latest transition in his career.

"Oh, it's so much fun," he said. "When you just hear people talking and you just get going and then you see the O-line running in, hitting, I feel like there's nothing better in football to see."

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EMMET FARNAN | The Observer

Irish senior running back C.J. Prosise hits the hole during Notre Dame's 42-30 win over Pittsburgh last Saturday at Heinz Field. In his first year after transitioning from receiver, Prosise has 975 rushing yards.

KEIVARAE RUSSELL | CB | EVERETT, WASHINGTON

Russell readjusts to life at ND after suspension

By ALEX CARSON
Associate Sports Editor

Editor's Note: A version of this article originally appeared in the Nov. 6 edition of The Observer.

A year ago, Notre Dame was 7-1, in the midst of the play-off discussion, with a series of November games ahead that would define its season.

While the Irish find themselves in effectively the same situation this year, KeiVarae Russell, who spent last season suspended following an Honor Code violation, doesn't.

"I broke down. It was tough," the senior cornerback said about the moment he learned he wouldn't play last year. "It was really tough for me to find out that I wasn't going to play an entire season last year."

But of the so-called "Frozen Five," Russell is the only one back in South Bend.

What did the Everett, Washington, native do during his season off? Quite a bit, actually.

"For me, I didn't just want to go train somewhere," Russell said. "That's just worrying about one mind, just football. For me, I just took advantage of this opportunity away."

"... I went to school, I was working in real estate — I'm management now but I was business marketing at the time — and I never had a job, so I kind of wanted to take advantage of that void in my life that I never had a job to take on a job. And not just any job, really learning about how markets operate, how markets work and real estate itself, I wanted to learn about that and how business works because I want to go into the field some day."

"But I also wanted to take classes to continue toward my degree, so I knocked out all my electives while I was there, and

I was getting some top-notch training back home, so I tried to get all facets of my life with where I was."

Russell said he didn't simply want to brush his "mistake" under the rug, opting instead to pursue something meaningful out of the experience.

"The mistakes I make, I want to learn about that mistake," Russell said. "I don't just want to, 'OK, let me just get past the mistake.' A lot of people just want to get past mistakes and, OK, they're not worried about it, and that mistake just sits with them so it can happen again. For me, it was like, 'OK, made a mistake, cool. Let's see how — how can we turn this mistake into something good?'"

Staying aligned with his philosophy on his year off, Russell said he doesn't shy away from discussing his experience.

"I don't mind talking about the situation — it's something I'm kind of proud of now that I got through it, but I got through it in a meaningful fashion, I guess," he said.

With Russell gone and injuries mounting up, the Irish lost all four of those defining November games a season ago — something the cornerback had to deal with 1,800 miles away.

"It was tough. It was really, really tough just because I know how special that season could have been, too — for myself but also playing with those guys," Russell said.

"It was one of those moments — I say it all the time, and it kind of gets repetitive, but it's true — it's tough to see because you want to see them win, but you can't. You really can't. You just have to sit back and take on some of the guilt. If I was there, could I have helped? Am I part of this, all this losing?"

Russell got through it by finding the light at the end of the



CAROLINE GENCO | The Observer

Irish senior cornerback KeiVarae Russell tackles a Navy ballcarrier during Notre Dame's 41-24 win over the Midshipmen on Oct. 10. Russell has two fourth-quarter interceptions in the last three games.

tunnel.

"It's one of those things where you've just got to mellow yourself down," he said. "It's tough to see, but everything was going to eventually get better."

For Russell, he saw a taste of success from day one at Notre Dame. When he came in as a freshman in 2012, he quickly earned a starting spot at cornerback.

"I was going to be starting at nickel, so I kind of solidified a starting position," Russell said. "You know, as a true freshman you want to start, you want to play."

But then Russell got his break with what he calls an "unfortunate, fortunate event," when starting cornerback Lo Wood went down with a season-ending Achilles injury in August. It meant Russell would be playing more than just the handful of nickel packages that would've featured him.

"Lo Wood went down, and then the next day, I see the depth chart, and I see myself with the ones," Russell said. "I knew I worked hard enough to get there, but it was still a surreal feeling, right, to be a true freshman at the University of Notre Dame. Especially since I switched over to cornerback three weeks before the first game."

Russell's strong play during his freshman year earned him national recognition — he was named a freshman All-American by the Football Writers' Association of America — and the Irish a trip to the BCS National Championship Game, where they lost 42-14 to Alabama.

"You have a different kind of fire because you lost it, you understand that extra edge you need to go," he said of the experience. "I think that's the thing I take with me."

Now he's back, and starting in a secondary that looks a lot different than the one he last played in at Notre Dame, when former defensive coordinator Bob Diaco's

3-4 scheme was the law of the land. With Brian VanGorder now in charge of the defensive corps with a wildly different scheme, Russell had to adjust.

"To come from the system I had, the Coach Diaco system where it's kind of 'bend, don't break,' right, and I was going into the system last year, and then I missed that year," Russell said. "I kind of came into a more aggressive system, and it's like you're throwing someone new into a new pool, right? So I kinda had to get that adjustment. I had a year off, had a new system, new techniques — I hadn't played man coverage — a new coach. So there's so many factors that came with it."

A month ago, Irish head coach Brian Kelly said while Russell was putting in the effort, it wasn't yet clicking on Saturdays. "KeiVarae works so hard in practice," Kelly said Oct. 6. "We just need to see that translate itself into games. It hasn't got there yet. We think maybe the year off has been a bit of a transition for him, but he works so hard in practice. The want to and the desire is there."

Russell said he may have underestimated what it would take to adjust — and he found a flaw in his preparation.

"Even I, myself, I kind of overlooked all those factors, right, so I think that's what it was," he said. "So I just had to sit back, really, and go 'OK, how do I get back? Season's long, right, and you're a great athlete, we already know that, so how do I allow your traits to just go out there and play?' I started realizing in my preparation, just really being in good positions at all times when I'm in practice. Not just, 'Okay, the ball's not coming my way, I don't have to be in good position.' So now, you watch film, even if the ball's the other way, I'm still acting like the ball's on my side. I'm finishing the plays off, and that's what [defensive backs coach Todd Lyght]

taught me."

And after his last three outings, it's hard to argue he hasn't figured something out.

Against Navy, Russell led the Irish in solo tackles with seven, stifling the Midshipmen's triple-option attack.

A week later, he intercepted USC senior quarterback Cody Kessler in the fourth quarter to help preserve an Irish lead and then tipped a pass junior safety Max Redfield intercepted to effectively secure the rivalry win.

In a more pressing situation last Saturday, Russell intercepted Temple junior quarterback P.J. Walker in the closing minutes to ensure the Irish escaped with a third consecutive win.

This week he'll be matched up with Pittsburgh junior receiver Tyler Boyd, one of the country's most dynamic playmakers. It's a battle Russell said he's looking forward to.

"It's going to be fun. ... I'm really excited for that challenge, playing against a good player," Russell said. "But I have to realize, he's playing against a good player, too. He's not just gonna be able to run by me, he's not just gonna be able to out physical me, out jump me, stuff like that. So I'm pretty sure he's doing his study just like I'm doing my study. I think that's the excitement."

"... He can't come with his B-game, that's not going to work. I can't come with my B-game, it's not going to work against him. I think that's the exciting part — we both come with our A-game. Whoever comes with his A-game is going to win the matchup."

But despite his recent success, Russell said he is confident in a more-improved future.

"It's going to keep getting better," he said. "It's going to get better this week, the next week, the week after that — and hopefully to the playoff."

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ANMARIE SOLLER | The Observer

Senior cornerback KeiVarae Russell scans the field last Saturday at Pittsburgh in Notre Dame's 42-30 win over the Panthers.

JOE SCHMIDT | LB | ORANGE, CALIFORNIA

Schmidt rises from walk-on to captain

By MAREK MAZUREK
Sports Writer

We are in love with Cinderella stories. Rags to riches, immigrant to senator and, in the case of Irish linebacker Joe Schmidt, freshman walk-on to captain for his dream school.

"I honestly don't think there can be a more dramatic transition," Schmidt said. "When I got [to Notre Dame] it was funny because I was on the very, very bottom of the totem pole and now being a captain on the team, a fifth-year guy who's playing, it's very strange."

While it may seem strange to Schmidt, it makes perfect sense to every Notre Dame fan. Schmidt came to Notre Dame as a preferred walk-on despite scholarship offers from other schools and spent his freshman year on the scout team. In his sophomore and junior seasons, he cemented his role for the Irish as a special teams contributor recording 21 tackles and even saw the field in the BCS Championship Game.

Though he didn't take the field every game early in his career, Schmidt said his goal-oriented approach helped him work his way into a starting role.

"When I got here, I created a list of goals that I wanted to have for myself," Schmidt said. "When I was five, my dad had me start making goals. ... I evolved that process over my life. On the wall in my room right now, I have overarching goals, but then I have smaller goals I work on each and every day to attain those big goal. That's something I worked on as a freshman and sophomore, even junior, and it's something

I still do today. I was so goal-oriented and focused to be a contributing member of this football team."

Schmidt got his chance the next year and started in eight games before suffering a season-ending ankle injury against Navy.

Now in his fifth and final year, Schmidt has been rewarded for all his hard work by being selected as one of the five team captains.

"I do a double-take every time I see the 'C' on game day," Schmidt said. "It's just surreal to see pictures with that 'C' on my chest. It's such an honor for me to have my teammates think of me that way. Especially on a team that has as many leaders as we have. To be a representative of this team, 'Team 127,' it's something that's very special to me. I don't have a lot of words for it."

Humbled by his teammates' support, Schmidt takes his captaincy seriously, and he said he went so far as to do research on people he felt have a handle on leadership.

"I've done a ton of research on leadership," Schmidt said. "I've read a bunch about different leaders that I thought had some part of the process figured out. I read [Warren] Buffet, I read Bruce Lee, [John] Wooden. I read stuff about them, their own work. I just wanted to see how they saw the world."

Though they may not be as famous, Schmidt also said he learned a great deal from his teammates over the years.

"I think in order to be a good leader, you have to be a good follower first," Schmidt said. "I just tried to follow and understand guys like [linebacker]



Irish graduate student linebacker and captain Joe Schmidt pursues Pittsburgh redshirt junior quarterback Nate Peterman during Notre Dame's 42-30 win at Heinz Field last Saturday.

Dan Fox or [safety] Harrison Smith when I first got here, or [defensive lineman] Kapron Lewis-Moore. I looked at those guys and saw what they did and looked at our coaches and what leadership practices I could use on my own. I really just tried to be the best follower I could be and learn as much as I could at the time."

The biggest thing Schmidt learned? Be true to yourself. And be loud.

"I've become more vocal, I've become more assertive later in my career," Schmidt said. "I don't think leading by example is a thing. Unless you're doing something as a leader, you're not leading anyone, no one's just going to follow to follow. ... I don't act any differently than I did when I was a freshman, I'm still the same kid."

On the field, Schmidt ranks third on the team with 47 total tackles, but he said enjoys the mental aspect of the game more than racking up statistics.

"I think my favorite part of playing linebacker and my favorite part of being the [middle] linebacker is the defense, to me, feels like an extension of my mind," Schmidt said. "I love the chess game I'm allowed to be a part of. I love the fact it's my responsibility the machine is working properly and efficiently as possible. ... I always wanted to learn the mental side [of the game]. It paid off dividends and helped make me a better football player, a way better football player because I'm playing against some of the best guys in the nation. ... The most fun is that leadership driving the defense."

Of course, Schmidt said he still loves making the big hits, too.

"Obviously I love hitting people," Schmidt said with a grin. "I love tackling people."

Ahead of Schmidt in tackles is junior linebacker Jaylon Smith,

the player Schmidt pointed to as the key to the defense.

"[Smith] is one of the most physically gifted human beings I've ever met," Schmidt said. "Combine that with the work ethic that he has. Honestly, it's such privilege to play next to a guy like that. He's so skilled in so many ways, and he's a good friend of mine. He sees the game the same way I do. ... Jaylon and I, I think we feed off each other, and we have a great working relationship, and that's something that I've really valued over the last two years."

The Irish are currently ranked No. 4 by the College Football Playoff committee, and though the pressure is high, Schmidt said this year's team can go all the way.

"We're fortunate to be in the position at this point where we're still in the conversation, and really the goal is to be in the conversation at the end of the year," Schmidt said. "I think this is the most talented football team I've ever been on, just in terms of straight top-to-bottom talent. I think that that's something that needs to be fostered and cultivated. We need to work hard, practice hard and prepare the right way and hopefully put ourselves in a position."

And as an elder statesman on the team, Schmidt said championship games are difficult to win having played in one himself in 2012.

"That was a tough game," Schmidt said. "Being [in a championship game] helps me understand where we are now in the season and how we need to continue to work. I've seen so many teams slip at this point, and it's so easy. We need to focus all of our attention on what's important right now."

Schmidt holds a degree in management-entrepreneurship from Notre Dame, but he said he doesn't want to think

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Irish graduate student linebacker Joe Schmidt celebrates after Notre Dame's 14-10 win over USC at Notre Dame Stadium on Oct. 19, 2013.

AVERY SEBASTIAN | CB | McDONOUGH, GEORGIA

Sebastian sidelined early after transfer

Observer Staff Report

Graduate student safety Avery Sebastian's path to Notre Dame stadium wasn't a traditional one.

The McDonough, Georgia, native spent four seasons with the Golden Bears before moving to South Bend for this season, taking advantage of the NCAA rule that allows graduate students to move to another program without sitting out a season if pursuing a degree not offered at their first institution.

Sebastian was reunited with junior defensive lineman Isaac Rochell, who he played with at Eagle's Landing Christian Academy in 2010, this year at Notre Dame after graduating from California with a degree in sociology in December 2014.

While at Cal, he had a mixed bag of results — he played as

a freshman and emerged in 2012 as a sophomore, starting four games in addition getting on the field as part of the special-teams unit.

Going into his junior year, Sebastian was slated as the Golden Bears' strong safety, and started the season brightly, recording 10 tackles and an interception in the season opener against Northwestern. However, Sebastian suffered a season-ending injury in the second game, giving him the year of eligibility that allowed him to arrive in South Bend.

After starting the season as a backup safety for Notre Dame, Sebastian has been sidelined since the season-opening, 38-3 win over Texas on Sept. 5. It is possible, however, he returns to the field for Notre Dame before the season is out after Irish head coach Brian Kelly announced

Tuesday he was cleared to return to practice.

Despite being cleared, Sebastian may not play the remainder of the season — with the Irish set to lose graduate student Matthias Farley and senior Elijah Shumate at the position, Kelly said Sebastian could sit out the next three games, plus postseason play, so he could potentially return to the Irish as a sixth-year player next season.

"Well, we're going to get him going," Kelly said. "If we need to play him, because we need to win games, we're going to play him. But I'm not going to run him down on the kickoff team, you know. We would preserve his year unless he needs to go in there and start for us and help us win these last three games."

Sebastian was unavailable for an interview.



Graduate student safety Avery Sebastian, right, pursues a Texas player during Notre Dame's 38-3 win over the Longhorns on Sept. 5.

JOHN TURNER | S | INDIANAPOLIS

Turner fulfills ambitions at Notre Dame

By ELIZABETH GREASON
Sports Writer

Indianapolis native John Turner was not the most heavily recruited player coming out of high school. However, since first arriving on campus his freshman year and first stepping foot on the field of Notre Dame Stadium during his sophomore year, Turner has made his presence felt, both as a member of the team and as a student of the University.

Many students across the country arrive at school with grandiose or overambitious visions for themselves. Turner, however, said he started at Notre Dame feeling quite the opposite.

"I just wanted to play football," Turner said. "I didn't have too many expectations for myself coming in. I just wanted to contribute to the team, and for the most part, I think I've lived up to that."



Senior safety John Turner prepares for a snap during the Blue-Gold Game on April 12, 2014 at Notre Dame Stadium.

Turner, a safety, has made an impact on the football field throughout his career at Notre Dame and has met his goal of contributing to the team. After redshirting his freshman year, he received playing time in each game the Irish played during his sophomore and junior years, with four tackles in each season.

Despite having taken the field for the Irish on a wide variety of occasions, Turner said he considers the high point of his Notre Dame football career to be the spring game going into his junior year.

"That was definitely my highlight," Turner said. "I had six tackles in that spring game and a half tackle for a loss. That was a really fun game."

For Turner, the decision to attend Notre Dame was an easy one. While the football program played a major role in the decision, he said that



Irish senior safety John Turner, left, tackles a Purdue ballcarrier during Notre Dame's 31-24 win over the Boilermakers on Sept. 14, 2013 at Ross-Ade Stadium in West Lafayette, Indiana.

ultimately, what truly drew him to Notre Dame was the fact he would get a top-notch education while simultaneously achieving his dream of playing football.

"I came here, first and foremost, for the education," Turner said. "I knew I wanted to major in the business school, and we've got the No. 1 undergraduate business school, so I was set from the get-go. And of course, to play at Notre Dame, there was no question about it. Going to Notre Dame was definitely what I wanted to do."

As a marketing major in the Mendoza College of Business, Turner said it has not always been easy balancing life as a student-athlete. He attributed his and his teammates' abilities to be successful in all aspects of life at the University to Notre Dame's academic staff.

"It's tough, but the school

gives us a lot of surrounding support to help us balance academics and the football commitments we have," Turner said. "I give a lot of credit to our academic staff."

While much of his time is dedicated to football, Turner said he understands the value of his Notre Dame education. "My greatest motivating factor has been envisioning myself walking across the stage at graduation," Turner said.

When he is not playing football or studying, Turner is typically spending time with his teammates, and he emphasized the important role the team camaraderie has played in his four years here.

"I love getting to know all the players and getting the chance to establish some really great connections with them," Turner said. "Everyone is from somewhere different, and they're all

different characters in their own sense. They're all really good people."

While the senior is on track to receive his degree in the spring, he still has another year of football eligibility. While he is, as of yet, unsure of how exactly he will proceed after graduation, Turner said he there will be football in his future.

"I have another year of eligibility," Turner said. "I have to figure out what I want to do. But I definitely want to play another year of football."

While Turner's plans for next year are still uncertain, his goal for the coming weeks are not, he said.

"We want to take it week by week, game by game," Turner said. "Hopefully we can win out and go to the College Football Playoff."

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ELIJAH SHUMATE | S | EAST ORANGE, NEW JERSEY

Shumate sky-rocket to new heights

By ZACH KLONINSKI
Sports Editor

Editor's Note: A version of this article originally appeared in the Oct. 30 edition of The Observer.

It's not often Irish head coach Brian Kelly uses the word "sky-rocketing" to describe one of his players.

But that's exactly what Kelly said when asked about the improvement shown this year by senior safety Elijah Shumate.

"Wish I had him for another couple years," Kelly said. "He's really coming into his own."

In nine games this season, Shumate has made 36 tackles, sixth on the team and third in the Notre Dame secondary. His 28 solo tackles are the third most by an Irish defensive player this season. He's dropped an opponent behind the line of scrimmage four times, the most of any Irish defensive back.

Shumate also effectively sealed the Irish win against Navy with his fourth-quarter interception.

"There's just an overwhelming confidence in what he's doing. He's not second-guessing things," graduate student safety Matthias Farley said of his teammate. "He's not looking to see if someone else is going to make a check. He knows what he has to do and what he's supposed to do and how everyone else is supposed to fit, so that confidence and the understanding of the system has allowed him to play a lot faster for us."

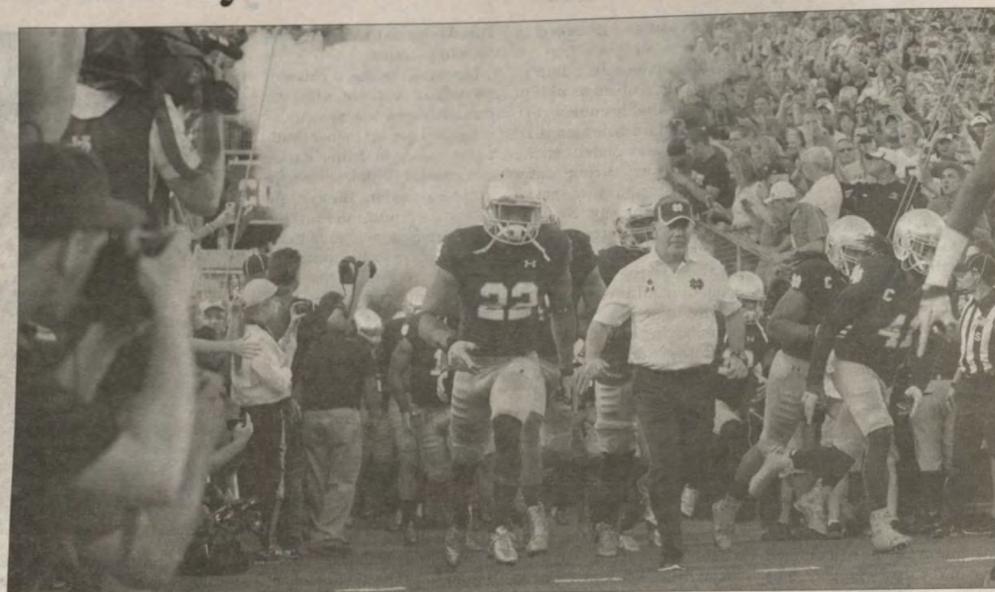
"Each and every Saturday he's been very, very consistent throughout the season."

This hasn't always been the case since Shumate arrived on campus, however. The four-star prospect signed with the Irish as the eighth-best safety in the class of 2012, according to Rivals.com, and Shumate admits the pressure of being such a highly-rated recruit added extra pressure to perform on the field.

"I was just not being myself. Just thinking about a lot of things and not just getting back to playing football, playing football like I've been doing since I was young," Shumate said. "I was always just wanting to do this and do that. With the high expectations coming into college, it made everything a lot harder."

The East Orange, New Jersey, native appeared in all 13 games during Notre Dame's 2012 run to the BCS National Championship game. Shumate saw the field mainly on special teams, but he also appeared as the nickel back, making nine tackles and breaking up three passes for the Irish. During his sophomore campaign in 2013, Shumate started four games and played in nine over the course of a season where he missed time with an injury, although he still managed to tally 23 tackles.

So when Austin Collinsworth went down with a shoulder



Irish senior safety Elijah Shumate leads Notre Dame onto the field before its season-opening, 38-3 win over Texas on Sept. 5. Shumate has one interception this year, against Navy on Oct. 10, and 36 tackles — his season high was against Virginia on Sept. 12 when he recorded 10.

injury last season, Shumate already had a fair amount of experience when he became the de facto starter 48 hours before the season-opening kickoff against Rice.

Although Shumate finished with 66 tackles while playing in all 13 games, he was inconsistent at times, Kelly said.

"He was working so hard at his craft," Kelly said. "And he was struggling, and it was wearing on him."

Kelly said this season he has seen the breakthrough he was always expecting.

"Some guys, it just takes longer to get to that point," Kelly said. "He's still cooking — he just wasn't done yet. He's just one of those guys that is ascending for us. It's really nice to see. He's such a great kid, cares so much."

"To see him start to break through, it's one of the gratifying things as a coach: That you get to see a player break through that wall. He's just been banging at that wall, and you can see that it's coming down for him."

Farley said it was never a matter of motivation for Shumate.

"He was hungry," Farley said. "He wanted to learn, he wanted to play. He played nickel his freshman year and against Michigan State he made a couple really, really nice plays."

It wasn't a matter of athletic ability, either.

"He's been a freak athlete since birth. I would assume," Farley said with a laugh.

Where Shumate said he has seen himself grow is going the extra mile to fine tune his athletic ability and compliment it with an increased understanding of the system the Irish want to run under first-year defensive backs coach Todd Lyght.

"I guess my focus towards the game and my understanding

[have really developed]," Shumate said. "Just basically me trying to better myself every day in whatever I could do, whether it's watching extra film and going out to practice and working on something like ball drills, jugs, footwork. Things like that. Just bettering myself every day."

Shumate said Lyght's approach to the game has also been a large part of finding himself on the gridiron.

"Coach Lyght has helped me tremendously," Shumate said. "He's been a big help, a big mentor towards the game to me because he just allows us to go out there and have fun. You know when you've got Coach Lyght here, you know when you get to the sideline he might chew you out, but you know you can go out there and if you're going hard, aggressive, that Coach Lyght is OK with that. He understands that players are going to make mistakes, and you've just got to learn from them."

"I think he's a player's coach, and he can really relate to us in a lot of different ways."

Lyght has also helped Shumate regain a sense of fun playing football he lost somewhere over the last three years, Shumate said.

"Now that we have Coach Lyght and [defensive graduate assistant Maurice Crum, Jr.], they make the game a lot more fun," Shumate said. "[I'm] not saying that [previous] coaches didn't make it fun, but I always felt like I had a burden on my back."

"Now I feel like I can just play. I can just have fun, just go out there and just work hard and have fun and make plays. ... I get excited about it because I feel like this is a year where we just have fun and play the game that we love. When you're having

fun out there and you're doing well and making plays, it makes it a lot more fun. So I like to keep everybody laughing and joking throughout the practices."

Farley said he has seen this transition first-hand this season.

"He's been up and done, as we know a lot of us have, but in this new system he's really found a home and really understands it," Farley said. "And he's enjoying it and not thinking so much because of that understanding."

This understanding has also manifested itself outside of Shumate's individual play, Farley said.

"He just comes to work every day. He leads by example, I think, in a lot of ways, but he also will see things that other guys are doing or correct something that someone else does mid-play or make something right that somebody else messed up, so I think guys see that and they're like, 'Alright, Elijah's on his stuff,'" Farley said. "And so people will go to him and ask questions. In the past, he would ask someone else the question, now he's being that guy that people look to and go to to ask questions."

Shumate said he doesn't see himself as a vocal leader.

"I just try to be myself. I'm an aggressive guy," Shumate said. "I like to come up and I like to make noise. I like to hit. So I just try to use that to my advantage."

"I've never been a guy to just be vocal and get in people's faces and stuff like that. I use a different [approach] in trying to become a leader on the defense and just try to lead by example with my play. Just trying to go out there every day, work hard, and everyone sees me work hard so everybody's just like, 'Alright, well now I just want to work hard.'"

Shumate said he didn't have to

look far for inspiration for hard work — both now and back when he first arrived on campus.

As a freshman, Shumate said he gravitated to then-graduate student safety Jamoris Slaughter.

"He was a leader, and I always wanted to just be that figure where once I step on the field, everybody was just looking up like, 'That was that guy,'" Shumate said. "But Jamoris just had that presence. ... that when he was on the field that it was the Jamoris Show, and Jamoris had the secondary and it was just going to be lights out. Jamoris was going to make plays and be physical, and he was going to play hard."

For the last couple years, he said he's been able to watch how hard junior linebacker Jaylon Smith works in all aspects of the game.

"I feel like he works really hard so everybody leaves and sees him working hard," Shumate said. "And he's out there making plays every week, so they think, 'Maybe if we worked as hard as him, we're going to be making plays like him.'"

Shumate also said he has an end goal for all that hard work.

"My goal is just to keep enhancing everything. Just keep enhancing everything as a football player," Shumate said. "Just becoming — taking to that role of being a leader. No questions, no 'if' factors, no inconsistency. Just being consistent every week, every day at practice just giving his all; every game give his all and just be that guy that everyone can look to. If Jaylon turns around, he's like 'I know Shumate got me.' [If senior defensive back] KeiVarae [Russell] turns around, he's like 'He's got me.'"

Contact Zach Klonsinski at zklonsin@nd.edu

HUNTER SMITH | H/LS | RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

Smith juggles school and football

By BRENNAM MOXLEY
Sports Writer

Prior to making the decision to attend Notre Dame, senior holder and long snapper Hunter Smith said football wasn't the highest priority during his college search. He was more concerned with looking at top academic institutions like Duke and Virginia, schools closer to home in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Smith said it was his high school offensive line coach who finally convinced him. The coach asked Smith if he wanted to play football in college, and he thought, "Why not?" so he sent a highlight tape to all of the schools he applied to. He received interest back from MIT, North Carolina, Virginia and Carnegie Mellon, who all offered him a walk-on spot.

Smith decided to attend to Notre Dame as a non-athlete, though, because he said he saw himself fitting in at Notre Dame, whether it was as a regular student or as a student-athlete.

He wasn't on the team as a freshman, so Smith said he was able to watch the BCS Championship Game as a fan and also experience the normal college social life for a bit before earning a spot on the squad entering his sophomore year.

Smith said it was a big step up in intensity for him in moving from his high school program to a prestigious college football one. He did not see the field that season but played in eight of the 13 games last season as a junior, including successfully holding for three extra-point

attempts and two field goals against Florida State.

Smith said balancing being on the football team while also majoring in chemical and bio-molecular engineering has been a challenge, but that the experience has, among other things, helped him drastically improve his time-management skills.

"I'm still working on it," Smith said jokingly. "[I leave] the [Guglielmino Athletics Complex] and go straight to the library almost every night."

Smith said one of his most distinct memories as part of the Notre Dame football program is the game against Florida State last season.

"That was an unreal game," he said. "Playing in that environment with some of my best friends under the pressure of two top-10 teams, national television and playing under the lights — it was unreal."

As for his plans after graduation, Smith said he plans to apply to medical school.

"I'm looking forward to hopefully becoming a doctor; I'm thinking a pediatrician," he said. "I love working with kids."

Smith added he enjoys the idea of the doctor-patient relationship in pediatric medicine but that he is also considering being a cardiologist or allergy immunologist, although a career as an orthopedic surgeon isn't out of the question either because he could connect with the sports side of medicine.

Smith said special teams players spend a lot of time together and get along well due to their strong work ethic and ability to understand each

other. He and fellow senior and long snapper Scott Daly are roommates, and Smith said he's also close with junior kicker John Chereson.

"We've been together for a long time, and I have an amazing time with [Chereson]," Smith said. "He's a goof-ball and just a pretty funny guy."

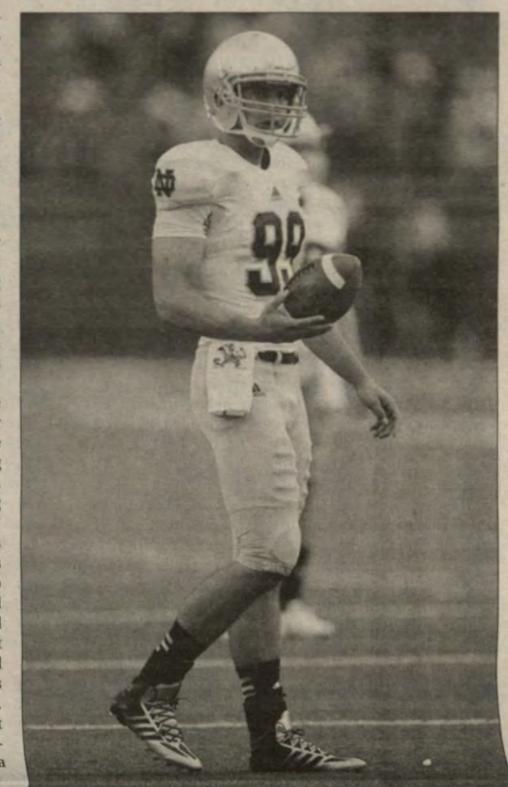
Smith mentioned former teammates Jude Rhodes and Kyle Brindza for mentoring him during their time with the team. Smith said Rhodes, who was also a walk-on, looked out for him during his first semester.

He said his time at Notre Dame will stay with him for the rest of his life, and he credits the school as having a huge influence over his life.

"It's been an amazing three-and-a-half, four years," Smith said. "I think it has definitely helped form me as a person and shaped me into the man I am. I have learned that the good and the bad all come together and it's not all going to be perfect and go great all the time, but it's been an amazing experience. I have a ton of great memories and a lot of amazing friends that will last a lifetime."

Contact Brenna Moxley at bmoxley01@saintmarys.edu

Senior holder and long snapper Hunter Smith walks on the field prior to Notre Dame's 41-30 loss at Michigan on Sept. 7, 2013.



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Senior holder and long snapper Hunter Smith practices a hold before Notre Dame's 30-22 win over Georgia Tech on Sept. 19.

RECRUITING

Irish staff welcomes two official visitors

By ALEX CARSON
Associate Sports Editor

Irish head coach Brian Kelly and his staff made a bold statement the eve before Notre Dame's game with Pittsburgh a week ago, bringing five coaches to watch four-star safety Damar Hamlin while in town — a rarity, according to Irish recruiting analyst Andrew Ivins.

"I've been covering recruiting for a couple of years, and I've been to a lot of different high schools and I've never seen five coaches and a head coach in the same place," Ivins said. Kelly, who covers Notre Dame recruiting for Rivals.com's Blue and Gold Illustrated, said, "I think Notre Dame wanted to make a statement while they were in the area, show Damar he was a priority and they did just that."

Ivins said Hamlin, a senior at Pittsburgh's Central Catholic High School, might return to Notre Dame's campus to make an unofficial visit — he made his official visit to the USC game in October.

Hamlin has many options in play, one of which is staying

in his hometown and playing for Pitt — but Ivins said Notre Dame's win a week ago likely had little impact on the four-star safety's choice.

"It depends on what each school is selling," Ivins said. "Right now, Pat Narduzzi, the [head] coach at Pitt, he's at least selling to keep the local talent home and he can point at the guys on the field for Pitt and be like, 'We're a couple guys away.'"

This season has seen Notre Dame turn to freshmen at key moments — running back Josh Adams ran for 147 yards against Pitt, while defensive lineman Jerry Tilley has made two starts and been on the field regularly — and Kelly said Notre Dame gives its freshmen a chance to play.

"I would say that we created an environment where when we're recruiting a young man, we're really encouraging him to come here and we give them truly an opportunity to compete as a freshman," the Irish head coach said.

Against Pitt, junior receiver Torii Hunter Jr. picked up snaps on the defensive side of the ball and Kelly said Notre

Dame's coaches typically make a decision on "two-way" athletes once they get on campus, like Tilley, who came in considered an offensive, not defensive, lineman.

"Within our general approach to recruiting, we have categories," Kelly said. "We have big skill players and we have skilled players and we have power players. So within that general category, we'll look at that skilled player and say, look, he's a guy that can play on either side of the ball. Then we'll figure it out when they get here."

The final home game of the year against Wake Forest means Notre Dame has one last chance to impress recruits on game day this campaign, but Ivins said it is not a huge recruiting weekend, with only two official visitors on campus, both four-star California natives in the class of 2016: defensive end Wole Betiku and receiver Damian Alloway.

"Notre Dame seemed to really stack up the start of the year with Texas and USC," Ivins said. "... At this stage of the game most of the guys they wanted to get in for official

visits during the season have already been."

Ivins said a factor in the low numbers on campus is the standard November weather in South Bend.

"I think Notre Dame's always very cautious of what the weather situation's going to be like if you're bringing in a kid from Florida or Southern California," Ivins said. "I don't think it's going to be too cold this weekend, but that's why they didn't stack up this with official visitors."

While there aren't a high volume of official visitors, Ivins said he expects a fair number of players in the class of 2017 to be on campus for unofficial visits.

Moving to the next class out, this year has marked the earliest the Irish staff has pursued juniors, Ivins said, with Notre Dame recruiting kids on an "accelerated" process, according to Kelly. The Irish head coach said recent personnel turnover has brought a new approach to how Notre Dame targets recruits.

"We restructured our recruiting office about 15 months ago, and in that

restructuring we had some personnel changes," Kelly said. "I think those changes now over the last eight months, I think, have really taken hold and have allowed us to really gain the traction."

Kelly said while satellite camps are becoming more popular, the Irish staff is still putting most of its efforts into "on the road" recruiting.

"I think we're all pretty clear that the satellite camps are a hot button topic right now," Kelly said. "It's legislation that's pending that will be a big topic of conversation. So we're not — we're not relying strictly on satellite camps as much as we're out on the road, we're across the country recruiting with an eye towards if we can get to a satellite camp that's sanctioned, we'll be there."

For more on Notre Dame recruiting, check out BlueAndGold.com. Email Andrew Owens at aowens@blueandgold.com and tell him The Observer sent you.

Contact Alex Carson at acarson1@nd.edu

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FOUR YEARS IN REVIEW

NOTRE DAME MAKES TITLE GAME, LOSES TO CRIMSON TIDE

Irish undefeated in regular season; streak ends Jan. 7, 2013



In Irish coach Brian Kelly's first two years, Notre Dame turned in a pair of 8-5 seasons.

Despite losing players to the NFL, the Irish were more successful in Kelly's third season, going undefeated against their regular season schedule.

Regular season highlights included a rout of Navy in Dublin, a 20-3 upset of Michigan State, an

emotional 13-6 victory over Michigan, an overtime goal-line stand against Stanford, a road victory over Oklahoma and a come-from-behind, three-overtime win over Pittsburgh.

The Irish reached No. 1 in the polls after a Senior Day victory over Wake Forest and sealed a berth in the BCS National Championship Game with a 22-13 victory over USC on Nov. 24.

tory over USC on Nov. 24.

Traveling to Miami to face off against Alabama in the national championship game, the Irish struggled to contain the Crimson Tide's offense, as Alabama rolled out to a 28-0 lead at halftime.

In the end, Notre Dame fell to the Crimson Tide, 42-14, ending the program's first national title run since 1988.

NOTRE DAME 20, STANFORD 13 (OT)

Oct. 13, 2012

NOTRE DAME 30, OKLAHOMA 13

Oct. 27, 2012

NOTRE DAME 29, PITTSBURGH 26 (3OT)

Nov. 3, 2012



The Irish faced the Cardinal in a top-20 matchup just as Manti Te'o was beginning his Heisman push. In overtime, the linebacker led the defense to stuff Stanford running back Stepfan Taylor three times at the goal line in a rain-soaked win that concluded with Irish fans rushing the field.



No. 5 Notre Dame and No. 8 Oklahoma were tied at 13 with just over five minutes left in the game, when a 50-yard catch by Chris Brown helped set up an Everett Golson rushing score. The Irish eventually pulled away to take a big road win and keep their perfect season alive.



Just a week after coming out victorious over Oklahoma, the Irish were put through the triple-overtime gauntlet against Pittsburgh. Notre Dame overcame a 14-point, fourth-quarter deficit to force extra time, where it grabbed the win on a one-yard rushing score by Golson.

OKLAHOMA 35, NOTRE DAME 21

Sept. 28, 2013

NOTRE DAME 31, MICHIGAN 0

Sept. 6, 2014

FLORIDA STATE 31, NOTRE DAME 27

Oct. 18, 2014



Just three weeks after Notre Dame fell to Michigan on the road, Oklahoma stopped the Irish in the team's first home loss since 2011. The deflating 35-21 defeat set the tone for what turned out to be a lackluster 9-4 season that ended with a trip to the New Era Pinstripe Bowl.



In the last scheduled matchup between the traditional rivals, Notre Dame capped the series on a high note, shutting out the Wolverines under the lights at Notre Dame Stadium. Golson threw for three touchdowns in the win, which Jaylon Smith called "great revenge" after the previous year's loss.



No. 2 Florida State and No. 5 Notre Dame, both undefeated, went down to the wire as the Irish appeared to score the go-ahead touchdown with 13 seconds left, but it was called off on an offensive pass interference flag. The loss started the season's downward spiral, which saw the Irish drop five of their last six games.

USC 49, NOTRE DAME 14

Nov. 29, 2014

NOTRE DAME 31, LSU 28

Dec. 30, 2014

CLEMSON 24, NOTRE DAME 22

Oct. 3, 2015



Just as the Florida State loss began the season's trainwreck ending, the embarrassing road loss to rival USC served both as its ending and its lowest point. Trojans quarterback Cody Kessler passed for six touchdowns and 372 yards as Malik Zaire impressed after replacing Golson in the second half of the blowout.



Despite the nightmare finish to the 2014 regular season, the Irish were able to salvage one bright spot in topping LSU in the Music City Bowl on a last-second, 32-yard field goal by Kyle Brindza. The win represented the only loss by a team in the SEC West division to a non-SEC West team in the entire season.



Just as with last year's game against Florida State, Notre Dame faced Clemson in a top-10 matchup of undefeated teams. Despite making a comeback after falling behind early, the Irish could not pull out the victory in the rain. Unlike the FSU loss, Notre Dame has won four straight games following the loss.