A welcome change
Irish roll over Cougars in first off-site home game in San Antonio

By MICHAEL BRYAN
Associate Sports Editor

SAN ANTONIO — Halloween featured very few scary moments for the Irish, who rolled to a 40-14 victory over Washington State in the Alamodome.

Notre Dame dominated the Cougars from start to finish, the final four minutes in which the Irish weren’t holding their breath in the closing minutes.

“When it’s a relief,” Irish junior quarterback Jimmy Clausen said. “Close games all the time, it kind of gets old.”

Clausen and the Notre Dame offense put up 30 points in the first half to put the game out of reach early, highlighted by a 50-yard catch by Golden Tate on a Clausen Hail Mary to end the half. Tate leaped over three Washington State defenders to make the catch and held on for the score.

“It was probably one of the most phenomenal catches I’ve seen anyone make, ever,” Irish coach Charlie Weis said. After a three-and-out on Washington State’s first possession, Notre Dame drove down the field before stalling in the red zone. Freshman kicker Nick Tausch converted the field goal to put the Irish up 3-0.

While the Irish defense stifled the Wildcat formation, a dominating Cougar defense thoroughly dominated the Irish offense, Clausen and the Notre Dame offense put up 30 points in the first half to put the game out of reach early, highlighted by a 50-yard catch by Golden Tate on a Clausen Hail Mary to end the half. Tate leaped over three Washington State defenders to make the catch and held on for the score.

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Kapron Lewis-Moore
Irish defensive end

The Cougars finally got on the board with 1:16 left in the half, scoring on a pass from Tuel to wide receiver Jared Karstetter. The time was enough for the Irish, however, as Tate made the touchdown grab as time expired.

“I’ve seen them before, it’s not the only one I’ve ever seen. But I don’t know how many times you see one guy with three guys around him go up,” Weis said of Tate’s leap.

The Notre Dame defense slowed its torrid pace in the second half, with injuries and the scoreboard playing a consideration. After putting on their first possession, the Irish were rolling down the field again when Clausen was tripped up near the Washington State end zone. Weis then removed Clausen, who only slightly aggravated his ongoing turf toe injury, for sophomore Dayne Crist. After an incompletion, Tausch converted his 14th-straight field goal, a Notre Dame record.

The Irish put their final points on the board on a long pass down the middle from Crist to classmate John Goodman, who outraced a Cougar defender 64 yards for the score.

Crist later suffered an injury while scrambling, hurtting his left knee. Weis said he would have an MRI this week but was “cautiously optimistic.”

The Notre Dame defense did its part in the blowout as well, holding the Cougars to 206 yards of total offense and 104 through the air. Cornerback Robert Blanton and defensive tackle Ian Williams each intercepted freshman Washington State quarterback Jeff Tuel, who was sacked five times.

“(Tuel threw for] a little over 100 yards and got sacked a bunch of times, he was under pressure,” Weis said. “They were getting after him today, there was no doubt they were getting after him.”

The Cougars managed 102 yards on the ground, but many of those came long after the Irish starters had left the game.

“I just felt like getting upfield and getting penetration was the key thing, and to stay low and be more athletic than them,” said Irish sophomore defensive end and Texas native Kapron Lewis-Moore.

Contact Michael Bryan at mbryan@nd.edu

“I don’t know how many times you see one guy with three guys around him go up ... I thought it was phenomenal.”

Charlie Weis
Irish head coach

I Irish junior wide receiver Golden Tate escapes a tackling during Notre Dame’s 40-14 victory over Washington State Saturday in San Antonio. Tate led the Irish with 89 yards receiving and a touchdown, and he added 61 rushing yards and a score.

“[Six] three and outs in the game the first defense gave up 100 yards offense the whole game. The defense gave up only 200 yards for the whole game,” Weis said at his Sunday press conference. “But when the first guys are in there, they gave up 109 yards. That was pretty impressive. With sacks, pressures, you know, playing the game behind the line of scrimmage. No explosives in the passing game. When is the last time we’ve been able to say that?”

The Irish held a significant edge in talent on both sides of the ball, and Notre Dame used that to its advantage to build, and then hold, the big lead over the course of the entire game.

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Clausen was sacked twice but the line made time for all three quar- terbacks and opened up holes to pave the way for a big day on the ground.

When you mentioned to someone that Notre Dame was playing Washington State in San Antonio, the most common response was “why?” I'll even admit that I was skeptical of the first off-site home game that was part of Notre Dame’s new 7-4-1 scheduling model. But after a weekend in San Antonio, it's clear that the idea is a great one, even if the execution could use a little improvement.

The weekend kicked off Friday night with a pep rally in front of the Alamodome, one of America’s most famous venues. Even though the pep rally wasn't the most raucous I've ever seen, the crowd itself was a sight to behold. Notre Dame estimated that close to 8,000 fans attended the rally, and the crowd spilled out onto the adjacent streets. The speakers included former Notre Dame running back Allen Pinkett and radio broadcaster Don Criqui, and the Band of the Fighting Irish played all the crowd favorites — and threw in a little Lone Star flair by playing “Deep in the Heart of Texas.”

The weekend continued on Saturday, San Antonio might as well have been South Bend. Irish fans owned the streets and the River Walk, but there was a surprising amount of Washington State crimson to be seen, too. As for the game itself, the Alamodome was about as close to Notre Dame Stadium as you could get, minus Touchdown Jesus. Mike Collins, the voice of Notre Dame Stadium, provided the public address and commentary. Tim McCarthy even had a fourth quarter mes- sage for the fans. Numerous people compared the atmosphere of the weekend to that of a bowl game, which is tough to replicate in the middle of the season.

The biggest positive aspect of the weekend, though, was the opportunity it gave to Irish fans in the Lone Star State. For a lot of Notre Dame supporters across the country, it just isn’t possible to get out to a game in South Bend. While there may not have been a huge student presence at the game, it’s a safe bet that for many of the alumni and subway alumni in Texas, this was their first Irish game in quite a few years, if not ever.

“When you get into an experi- ment like this — and this is an experiment, taking a home game on the road — you need a great partner.” Notre Dame Athletic Director Jack Swarbrick said at the pep rally. “And we couldn’t have a better partner for our first off-site game than San Antonio.” That being said, the weekend wasn’t perfect. Despite the best efforts of Notre Dame and its alumni clubs in Texas, the game did not sell out. If you’re counting this as a true home game, it’s the non-sellout since the infamous 1973 Thanksgiving game against Air Force. The announced atten- dance was 53,407, about 82 per- cent of the Alamodome’s capacity of 65,000. The poor ticket sales could prob- ably be attributed to the weak opponent. As nice as the Washington State fans were, the Cougars just aren’t the type of team Notre Dame should be aim- ing for with these games. Imagine what the atmosphere would have been like if the Cougars had been against a top tier team like Miami or Oregon, to name two. Hopefully, Swarbrick and the athletic department will learn from this weekend and make improvements for next year’s game against Army in Yankee Stadium. In all, though, it was a surprisingly positive experience in San Antonio for fans, coaches and players alike.

“If the rest of them go like this, sign me up,” Weis said. “It really was a great experience.”

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

Contact Sam Werner at swerner@nd.edu
Hughes makes most of opportunity

By MICHAEL BRYAN
Associate Sports Editor

SAN ANTONIO — Junior running back Robert Hughes hasn’t always known when he would play or where he would play. But when given the opportunity to step up for us, Armando Allen was down and didn’t play, he ran the ball really well for us today,” Irish quarterback Jimmy Clausen said.

‘He did really well, stepping up for us.’

Jimmy Clausen
Irish quarterback

Entering the season it appeared Hughes would see a decrease in playing time, as Allen was the clearly established starter and sophomore Jonas Gray stood in the second string on the depth chart.

Then Hughes was moved into a part-time role at fullback following an injury to senior James Aldridge against Nevada. As Allen battled injuries, however, Hughes began receiving more time at running back and earning carries.

“I really don’t know when the switch went on, but the switch definitely went on and he decided that this was what he was going to do,” said Weis. “Once he made that decision that this is how I am, run with the ball, run hard, leaving forward, not trying to make every one miss, once he made that decision, I think it’s kind of cleaned up for him, how he’s going to play the game.

Hughes rushed for 68 yards and a touchdown against Purdue while Allen sat out, and then ran for 70 yards and another score against Texas Tech.

In San Antonio, with Allen out again, Hughes received 24 carries, only his second game with over ten this season. Hughes said the repetitions helped him get into the flow of the game and wear down the Cowboys.

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Notre Dame imposed its will on a reeling Washington State team in the first in a new series of off-site home games in stadiums across the country. Junior quarterback Jimmy Clausen (22-for-27, 268 yards) was efficient, finding junior receivers Duval Kamara and Golden Tate (80 receiving yards, 61 rushing) for touchdowns before leaving the game in the third quarter. Tate and sophomore running back Robert Hughes (131 rushing yards) each ran for touchdowns. Sophomore backup Dayne Crist connected with sophomore John Goodman for a 64-yard scoring strike but was forced to exit with a leg injury. The Irish defense held the hapless Cougars to just 206 yards offense as Notre Dame built a 30-7 halftime advantage before coasting to a 40-14 victory. Junior defensive tackle Ian Williams and sophomore defensive back Robert Blanton each had interceptions, and Darius Fleming, Zeke Motta, Ethan Johnson, Steve Filer and Paddy Mullen each recorded sacks on Cougars quarterback Jeff Tuel.

For more photos, check out the photo gallery at ndsmcobserver.com

Clockwise from top: Junior linebacker Brian Smith jumps to defend a Jeff Tuel pass; junior receiver Golden Tate makes a leaping grab on a first-half Hail Mary; sophomore defensive lineman Ethan Johnson makes a tackle; freshman kicker Nick Tausch connects on a kick; sophomore receiver John Goodman breaks away for a score.