Jimmy Clausen set career-highs in pass attempts (51), completions (37) and passing yards (452), and a new school record of completions, Golden Tate made nine catches for 132 yards and a touchdown and Michael Floyd returned to the lineup for Notre Dame.

The numbers appear to be from a Notre Dame rout, but the Irish were unable to come back against Navy Saturday, falling 23-21. Notre Dame was in contention for a BCS berth heading into Saturday’s matchup, but Navy’s victory effectively ended that hope. The Irish also fell behind 7-3 as the Midshipmen moved to 7-3.

“I think it came down to red zone production for us,” Irish coach Charlie Weis said Saturday afternoon, and he was right. Notre Dame scored on only two of their six chances in the red zone.

As in the Irish style this season, Notre Dame worked on making a comeback with less than a minute left. After the Irish recovered an onside kick, Clausen found Tate for a 31-yard touchdown pass to make the score 23-21 with 24 seconds left in the game. The following onside kick went out of bounds, however, and Notre Dame left South Bend with their second straight loss at Notre Dame Stadium.

Navy quarterback Ricky Dobbs ran for 158 yards and rushed for 102 in the game, second to fullback Murray’s 158. Going into the game, Weis knew Murray would be a threat.

“Well, I think the first thing you have to do is stop the fullback, Weis said. “That’s where the whole defense starts, with stopping the fullback. He had too many yards, some of them easy yards, and he had a couple of big runs.”

With Notre Dame did outdo Navy in game stats, including going the entire game without a turnover.

On top of Clausen’s impressive career highs in attempts, completions and passing yards, he had one interception and threw for two touchdowns. His 452 passing yards rank as the fourth highest in a single game in Notre Dame history and are the most by an Irish signal caller since Brady Quinn threw for 467 against BYU in 2005.

As good as the Clausen-orchestrated offense was, Navy’s triple-option offense ruled the field. Their offense did great today and executed their game plan,” Clausen said. “I give a lot of credit to their coach, their defense and all their players.”

Tate also put up strong numbers in the game, most coming out of the second half where he had eight catches and 127 of his 132 yards. Michael Floyd, playing in his first game since breaking his clavicle against Michigan State on Sept. 19, had 10 receptions for 141 yards and a touchdown, tying his career high in receptions.

Leading the Irish defense Saturday was Brian Smith with 10 tackles, followed by Ian Williams with eight.

Notre Dame could not cross the 50-yard line on its first possession when senior wide receiver Robby Parris fumbled a reception that was recovered by Navy. From there, Dobbs marched the Midshipmen down the field to score and Navy led 7-0. Despite moving the ball well, Notre Dame failed to score in the first half. Freshman kicker Nick Tausch attempted a field goal from the Navy 24 and missed wide left, leaving Notre Dame still behind 7-0. The Midshipmen began the second quarter with another touchdown on Murray’s 25-yard run to make it 14-0 at halftime.

The Irish finally got on the board with 5:03 left in the third quarter after junior kicker Nick Tausch made it over the goal line for a 14-7 score. However, Navy responded with one of their own when Dobbs threw a 52-yard pass to junior wide receiver Greg Jones to increase their lead to 21-7.

Sophomore corner back Robert Blanton apparently thought Jones was an ineligible receiver, and as a result Jones was wide open on the play.

The Irish finally started to rack up points late in the fourth quarter. Floyd caught a 12-yard touchdown pass with 4:46 left to make it 21-14. After a key defensive stop that forced a Navy punt, the Irish started a new drive at their own 13-yard line with time running out. Their success was cut short, however, when Navy sacked Clausen twice, the second time for a safety with a minute left in the game.

Weis felt along the same lines as his players in terms of correcting mistakes and looking ahead. Not only is he prepared to fix his team’s mistakes from Saturday, but Weis is also ready to look to next week.

“Right now that’s the only thing you are chasing,” he said. “You can’t be worrying about two or three games down the line, you’ve got to worry about Pittsburgh at 8 Saturday night.”

Banked Notre Dame teams had defeated unranked Navy teams 41 straight times, a streak dating back to 1936.

Contact Meaghan Veselik at mvesel01@saintmarys.edu

---

**quote of the game**

“People make mistakes. I mean, this game was a mistake.”

— Ian Williams

Irish defensive tackle
Irish caught looking ahead

The players won’t say it. The coaches won’t say it. Nobody within with the Notre Dame football program is admitting it, but to anyone who follows sports, it’s fairly obvious what happened to Notre Dame on Saturday.

The Irish fell into the prototype trap game. Next weekend’s show-down in Pittsburgh was supposed to be the make-or-break game. It was all set up perfectly to be two top 20 teams nationally broadcast in prime time. Except the Irish forgot about that pesky little Navy team that always plays Notre Dame tough. Who could really blame them? Navy had only beaten Notre Dame once in the past 45 years. Except that one time was two years ago, and many of the players on Notre Dame’s roster played in that game. This team, more than any Irish squad of the past half-century, should not have underestimated what Navy was capable of. The quotes from after the game were eerily reminiscent of the interviews after the loss to Syracuse last season, when the usually fiery Golden Tate said he felt the attitude was “Eh. “I think it did feel a little flat,” Tate said after Saturday’s loss. “I’m not sure why. I definitely did feel it, but I’m not sure why we felt that way, why I felt that way.”

The worst part of Saturday’s loss, though, isn’t that it was the second loss to Navy in the past three years, or the fact that this year’s junior and senior classes never will see a win against Navy in Notre Dame Stadium during their time as a student. No, the worst part was that, even though the loss was unexpected, it was hardly shocking. The Irish had been talking a tightrope all season, and so far had come out on the winning end more often than not. Saturday, though, all the woes that had haunted the Irish all season showed up once again.

First, the red zone production was abysmal. Including Saturday’s game, the Irish have scored touchdowns on only 21 percent of their trips inside the opponent’s 20-yard line. On Saturday alone, Notre Dame found points on only two of the six red zone chances. Next, the run defense, and defense in general, was gashed repeatedly. The Midshipmen rushed for a staggering 348 yards against Notre Dame. A run defense that looked to have improved over the past few weeks regressed back to early-season form.

It would be one thing if the Irish were burned by Navy quarterback Ricky Dobbs or one of the Midshipmen’s speedy tailbacks, but the play that seemed to give the Irish fits was a simple dive play to the fullback. Vince Murrey led the Midshipmen in rushing, with 158 yards on only 14 carries, almost all of them right up the middle.

Poor tackling, another bugaboo for the Irish all season, showed up in spades Saturday. How many times did a Navy player appear to be stopped, only to rattle off a few more yards after initial contact. Against Navy’s triple option, it appeared that Notre Dame’s struggling pass defense would get a break, and the Midshipmen did pass only three times all day. On one of those passes, though, the Irish got burned for a 52-yard touchdown pass where it appeared the Irish simply neglected to cover the Navy receiver.

On the other side of the ball, the offensive line play was suspect as well. It’s one thing to give pressure when USC is rushing only four defensive linemen, but to give up consecutive sacks — and one safety — to a Navy line that weighs in at an average of just 6’2 3/4 pounds is simply unacceptable for a team with legitimate BCS aspirations.

Despite all of this, Notre Dame still had a chance to win. I’ll admit that when the Irish regrouped in session in the waning minutes down seven, I thought that Jimmy Clausen would lead yet another fourth quarter comeback. It wasn’t to be, though, and the loss obviously raises more questions about Charlie Weis’ job security. In all likelihood, those questions won’t be answered until the end of the season.

One thing is certain, though. The Irish won’t be getting distracted by any BCS talk for the rest of this season. 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

Tune in to the Irish Insider podcast at ndsmcobserver.com/podcasts.
Offense fails to convert in red zone

By ALEX BARKER
Sports Writer

With the return of Michael Floyd to the lineup after sitting out the last five games, a broken collarbone, Irish coach Charlie Weis acknowledged that his team’s offense lacked, at times, unstoppable firepower. But once again, the Irish offense just couldn’t get it done when it mattered most.

Junior quarterback Jimmy Clausen waits for the snap near the Navy end zone during Saturday’s 23-21 loss to the Midshipmen. Notre Dame scored on just two of their six trips into the red zone, which included an interception and a fumble.

“Getting the ball down into position to score was not the issue; it was scoring that was the issue,” he said.

With the good field position and the defense unable to make stops for much of the game, it seemed as though things couldn’t possibly get worse for the Irish.

After hitting a Notre Dame record 14 consecutive field goals, kicker Nick Vela missed his only two attempts against the Midshipmen, from 30 and 41 yards.

This would come back to haunt the Irish. After failing to convert on three plays from inside the five-yard line, Weis was faced with a tough choice on fourth-and-goal down 14-0 early in the second quarter. He elected to go for it and the Irish turned the ball over on downs after quarterback Jimmy Clausen’s pass fell incomplete in the end zone.

“We had missed a couple field goals in that game, and sometimes that taints you,” Weis said of the decision. “I thought that the possessions in the game, especially when they were in the red zone, but the two scores were touchdowns, I think the possessions in the game and the time of possession was going to win that game and we were going to need some points.”

“What really cost the Irish was the stretch of uncharacteristic turnovers that cost them valuable scoring opportunities.

Down by two touchdowns late in the third quarter, the Irish were threatening to close the gap as they made their way down to Navy’s nine-yard line. But instead of sliding down or getting out of bounds to avoid contact as he has done all season, Clausen got impatient, taking on a Navy defender inside the two-yard line and fumbling the ball after taking a huge hit.

“I just got hit. A guy made a good play, and I fumbled the ball,” Clausen said of the play.

On the next possession, the Irish once again drove deep into Navy territory before turning the ball over. Clausen’s pass, intended for Floyd, was intercepted by Floyd and returned 17 yards.

“We had missed a couple field goals in that game, and sometimes that taints you,” Weis said of the decision. “I thought that the possessions in the game, especially when they were in the red zone, but the two scores were touchdowns, I think the possessions in the game and the time of possession was going to win that game and we were going to need some points.”

“What really cost the Irish was the stretch of uncharacteristic turnovers that cost them valuable scoring opportunities.

Down by two touchdowns late in the third quarter, the Irish were threatening to close the gap as they made their way down to Navy’s nine-yard line. But instead of sliding down or getting out of bounds to avoid contact as he has done all season, Clausen got impatient, taking on a Navy defender inside the two-yard line and fumbling the ball after taking a huge hit.

“I just got hit. A guy made a good play, and I fumbled the ball,” Clausen said of the play.

On the next possession, the Irish once again drove deep into Navy territory before turning the ball over. Clausen’s pass, intended for Floyd, was intercepted by Floyd and returned 17 yards.
The Observer

N
IRISH INSIDER

page 4 Monday, November 9, 2009

Notre Dame had no trouble moving the ball against the Midshipmen, never even punting. But as soon as the Irish were near the Navy end zone, everything that could go wrong did go wrong. A failed fourth-down attempt, a fumble at the two-yard line, two missed field goals and an interception off the back of Michael Floyd all dismantled Notre Dame drives that looked as if they would result in scores. The Midshipmen rushed for 348 yards, gashing the Irish up the middle and often pitching to uncovered backs. Despite numerous miscues, Notre Dame still had a chance to force overtime in the closing minutes. This time, however, there was no dramatic comeback, as Clausen was sacked on third and fourth downs to preserve the Navy win. A late onside kick recovery and touchdown pass from Jimmy Clausen to Golden Tate gave a glimmer of hope, but with the loss Notre Dame’s BCS chances went down the drain.

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

Too little too late

Clockwise from top: Sophomore defensive tackle Ethan Johnson leaps in effort to block a Navy field goal, freshman running back Theo Riddick races downfield, junior defensive tackle Ian Williams is upended trying to block a punt, sophomore wide receiver Michael Floyd runs after a reception, senior receiver Robby Parris fumbles.