PITTSBURGH — Golden Tate nearly brought the Irish back, but he couldn’t quite do it alone.

Neither could Dion Lewis, but he did enough.

Lewis rushed for 152 yards and a touchdown and No. 8 Pittsburgh beat Notre Dame 27-22 Saturday.

“It was a great win for the program, a great win for the kids, particularly those who were around here five years ago when we had a bad experience here,” said Panthers coach Dan Devanstedt, referring to Notre Dame’s 42-21 win over Pittsburgh in 2005 in both his Irish coach Charlie Weis’ debuts.

The loss dropped the Irish to 6-4, while the Panthers moved to 9-1, 5-0 in Big East play.

“We got the ball in his hands who has the ball in his hands when he’s the one guy with the ball in his hands,” said Bill Stull, the Panthers quarterback for Clausen three for 283 yards, most of them in the second half, and a touchdown and an interception.

Tate wouldn’t let the Irish lose. Down 27-16, he caught a punt, dodged a tackler and burst through the coverage team for an 87-yard return touchdown to make the score 27-22 with 11:14 left in the fourth quarter. On the two-point conversion attempt, Clausen’s shovel pass to tight end Mike Ragone fell incomplete and the score stayed the same.

Tate also had nine catches for 113 yards and a touchdown.

“We got Golden out there because he’s the best guy with the ball in his hands,” Stull said. “We were going to make a chance for making a big play.”

As good as he played, though, Tate wanted more.

“I didn’t get open enough,” he said. “Put it on me. I need to make more plays.

Notre Dame forced a punt and got the ball back near the end of the game, but Clausen was hit as he threw on third down and the pass fell incomplete. The play was reviewed and ruled a fumble, and Pittsburgh ran out the clock. Clausen said he couldn’t tell during the play whether or not he was fumbled or the ball was knocked out when his arm was moving forward.

The Irish started to move the ball in the fourth quarter. Clausen completed six-of-eight passes on an 11-play, 71-yard drive that ended with an 18-yard touchdown pass to Tate. That made the score 27-16 with 9:40 remaining.

Clausen completed nine-of-12 passes for 93 yards and a touchdown in the fourth quarter.

Before that, however, the offense stalled.

“It was kind of weird looking back on it, I knew we were moving the ball and then something happened to set us back,” Clausen said.

Clausen completed 93 of the 161 yards on the ground while Notre Dame had only 66. Running back Armando Allen played well in the first half, but was used sparingly in the second.

He finished with 14 carries for 77 yards.

Junior kicker David Ruffer connected with receiver Jonathen Baldwin for two important passes on the ensuing drive, one a 21-yard third down conversion to the Notre Dame 36-yard line and the next a 36-yard touchdown. The score gave Pittsburgh a 10-3 lead with 2:31 left in the first half.

“He [Baldwin’s] awesome,” Stull said. “You have to have faith and know who you’re throwing to and I knew who I was throwing to with Baldwin.”

Bill Stull
Pittsburgh quarterback

“Pittsburgh running back Ray Graham spins out of Irish safety Sergio Brown’s tackle during a 53-yard run in the second half of the Panthers 27-22 win over Notre Dame Saturday. The loss dropped the Irish’s record to 6-4 on the season.”

Dion Lewis
Pittsburgh running back

Lewis piled up 152 yards and scored the 50-yard touchdown to put the Panthers up by 18.
Irish need to get aggressive

The Irish offense is stacked with playmakers and can hang points on anyone in the country. But those playmakers have to be utilized for this to occur. If they're not, the offense is no better than average.

Average won’t win football games. With Notre Dame’s season slowly carrying out of control, now is not the time for the coaches to ease off the accelerator and pump the brakes. They need to floor it.

They can land the punches. But they’ve got to throw them first.

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Observer. Contact Bill Brink at wbrink@nd.edu.

PITTSBURGH — Ever watch Golden Tate get up after a tackle? He stands there for a second, sometimes starting down the guy who caught him, thinking: “I’m only on the 37-yard line right now,” he thinks, frustrated. “Why am I not in the end zone?”

He’s got a passion that leads him to believe every play he’s a part of should result in a touchdown. He’s fiery, he’s talented and he’s aggressive.

Interesting idea. Going out there throwing everything you’ve got into winning the football game.

Notre Dame played too conservative against Pittsburgh, hiding its time near the ropes while dodging Pitt’s punches.

“It was how we called the game,” Weis said. “We were playing the game relatively conservatively. When you’re playing on the road, raucous crowd, you don’t play the same way at home as you do on the road.”

Weis has somewhat of a point. You don’t want to be overaggressive when you step into the ring against a good team, especially since the ring is in Pittsburgh’s backyard. Don’t go throwing haymakers or the Panthers will kill the field position game.

A close loss to a very good Pittsburgh team, but an all-around frustrating performance.

Irish need to get aggressive

Tune in to the Irish Insider podcast at ndsmcobserver.com/podcast

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Monday, November 16, 2009
Panthers control line of scrimmage

By SAM WERNER
Associate Sports Editor

Even though Dion Lewis and Ray Graham are the ones that will show up on the highlight reels, Pittsburgh’s offensive and defensive lines were just as crucial in the victory Saturday night.

Pitt’s defensive ends gave us a lot of pressure which forced Jimmy Clausen to step up.

Charlie Weis
Irish head coach

The Irish are 69th in the country in sacks allowed, having given up a total of 21 for the season also cost the Irish when senior guard Dan Wenger was whistled for a 15-yard personal foul penalty for a chop block on Notre Dame’s final drive of the game. The penalty pushed the Irish back from 2nd-and-1 to 2nd-and-16.

Just when we had momentum on that last drive, the offensive line was just as effective early, and junior running back Armando Allen finished with 77 yards on just 14 carries. Once the Irish fell behind, though, they were forced to all but abandon the run in an effort to play catch-up.

“Pitt’s defensive ends gave a lot of pressure which forced Jimmy Clausen to step up.”

“Even though the Panthers sacked Clausen just twice on the night, the second resulted in a game-ending fumble, and the junior quarterback had defenders in his face throughout the game.”

Pittsburgh junior defensive end Jahal Sheard said after the game that the Panther line worked as a unit during the week to bring the heat Saturday night.

“I think in the past, I was getting a little bit predictable on my moves,” Sheard said. “This week I really studied my opponents and with the help of our defensive line man Greg Rometz getting a good push, I was able to get some good pressure.”

The Irish are 69th in the country in sacks allowed, having given up a total of 21 so far for the season.

An offensive line that was supposed to be much improved coming into the season also cost the Irish when senior guard Dan Wenger was whistled for a 15-yard personal foul penalty for a chop block on Notre Dame’s final drive of the game. The penalty pushed the Irish back from 2nd-and-1 to 2nd-and-16.

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On the other side of the ball, the Pittsburgh offensive line was just as effective, allowing no sacks on senior quarterback Bill Stull. The Irish only hurried Allen four times on the night.

The Panther offensive line also dominated in the running game, as freshmen combined for 209 yards on the ground. Each also had a run of over 50 yards. “We let up too many big plays,” junior linebacker Brian Smith said. “We lost.”

Notre Dame’s running attack appeared to be effective early, and junior running back Armando Allen finished with 77 yards on just 14 carries. Once the Irish fell behind, though, they were forced to all but abandon the run in an effort to play catch-up.

 statistics

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Notes: Record number of close games

By JENN METZ
Sports Writer

The Irish loss to the Panthers Saturday marks the eighth game Notre Dame has played in decided by seven points or less this season — a school record. The 1990 team played in seven such close games, including the Orange Bowl.

Junior quarterback Jimmy Clausen became the second Irish quarterback to achieve over 3,000 passing yards in both multiple and consecutive seasons in Notre Dame history (2008 and 2009). He joins Brady Quinn (2005 and 2008) in holding that title. Clausen’s one touchdown pass to junior wide receiver Golden Tate at 9:10 in the fourth) grants him sole possession of second place on the career passing touch- down list. Saturday’s game was his 11th-straight with at least one touchdown pass.

Tate registered Notre Dame’s first punt return for a touchdown since Tom Zbikowski against North Carolina in 2006. His 87-yard run was the seventh-longest punt return in school history and the longest since 1989.

Tate and sophomore wide receiver Michael Floyd both recorded more than 100 receiving yards at the game, with 113 and 107 yards respectively. For the first time in school history, two players have had over 100 receiving yards in two straight weeks.

Last week against Navy, Tate had 132 yards and Floyd had 141 yards. The 100-yard receiving game is Tate’s seventh of the season and the 13th of his career. He now is tied with Tom Gaafore (1969-71) for fifth in single-season school history.

Tate has 2,383 career receiving yards, which ranks fourth best in Notre Dame career history.

Senior right tackle Sam Young registered his 48th consecutive start against Pittsburgh, tying the school record held by Tom Zbikowski (2004-07) and Maurice Crum (2005-08). He is the only Notre Dame offensive lineman to start every game of his career.

Junior kicker David Ruffer started Saturday’s game after freshman Nick Tausch suffered an injury in pregame warm-ups. The former kicker for Siegfried’s interhall football team recorded his first caree point with his 42-yard field goal at 4:21 in the second quarter. He later made one of two point after attempts. Ruffer joined the team in the 2008 season before the game at Washington.

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For the second straight game, the Irish struggled to score in the first half. Throughout the game, Pittsburgh’s defense put pressure from the edges on Jimmy Clausen and contained the wide receivers from deep passes. Fortunately, the Notre Dame defense held strong for most of the first two quarters, heading into halftime trailing 10-3. Sophomore wide receiver Jonathan Baldwin made several spectacular catches for the Panthers, who built up a 19-point lead in the fourth quarter. Freshman running back Dion Lewis broke free for a 50-yard run, and it looked like the game was over. But a Golden Tate punt return brought the Irish within a score of Pittsburgh, and a key defensive stop gave Jimmy Clausen and Notre Dame a chance at yet another late comeback.

Pittsburgh’s pressure proved too much, however, and what was originally ruled an incomplete pass was reviewed and deemed a game-ending fumble.

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