We need to care about Our Lady. We need to care about Notre Dame.
Don’t expect to see whole new system just yet

The helmets will still be gold. The weather will still be awful. The field will probably still be 100 yards.

That’s about all that will be familiar Saturday as fans get their first glimpse of the new Notre Dame team, with a different coach on the sidelines and a different quarterback leading the huddle.

Supporters will head to the Blue-Gold Game looking for proof that change is not always a bad thing.

But at this point, the Irish have nothing to prove.

It would be a stretch to say that Irish coach Brian Kelly has installed a new offense and defense for the scrimmage. A more accurate statement is that Kelly has begun to install his new scheme and the players have begun to learn it. The entire breadth of the new systems certainly won’t be seen Saturday. The coaches seem hopeful that a majority of the new offense will be installed in time for Purdue in September.

Most of the spring practices were spent getting players used to the speed of practice and teaching them about expectations. “Progress” meant being able to go all-out for 75 active minutes of a two-hour practice.

On Saturday, it will be the same; the team will be expected to go full-speed through the first half, but may need to tone it down for the second.

The defense won’t be given full rein during the game, either. That’s for good reason, as it would be irresponsible to allow an important offensive player to get hurt in a game that doesn’t matter. But it means that sophomore linebacker Manti Te’o, one of the more entertaining players on the defense, probably won’t be making any massive hits, nor will any others.

Junior quarterback Dayne Crist, recovering from off-season knee surgery, will play but has admitted that he is not at 100 percent. Junior tight end Kyle Rudolph, recovering from off-season shoulder injury, will be used sparingly.

The same goes for junior linebacker Darius Fleming and sophomore wide receiver Theo Riddick, both of whom will be important figures in the fall.

In short, the spring game will be absent much of the excitement a real game would bring, in terms of interesting game plans, big tackles and star players.

Through 13 practices, the same words have sprung up over and over. “Evaluation,” the coaches said. “Competition,” the players translated.

And that won’t change by Saturday. The glorified practice will certainly showcase some of Notre Dame’s excellent talent, in terms of interesting game plans, big tackles and star players.

But it might allow them to make a decision on whether senior Taylor Dever and junior Trevor Robinson should play right guard or right tackle. Or whether freshman receiver Tailer Jones is ready to line up opposite Michael Floyd. It might allow them to answer 1,000 other little questions.

Or it could answer nothing at all.

In his last scheduled interview before the Blue-Gold Game, Kelly had little to say about a depth chart. “We need more time,” he said. “We need all summer, we need preseason camp. We’re going to need all our time.”

Kelly was speaking specifically about the wide receiver situation, but his message applies to every aspect of Notre Dame’s team as it stands.

The Irish need all the time they can get, and it seems clear from the spring that Kelly will use that time wisely. After a summer of hard conditioning and a grueling camp in August, when the new recruits have been added and more of an offense installed, the team will have something to prove. But not yet.

The Blue-Gold Game will certainly be exciting for anyone looking to see Brian Kelly in action. But it won’t hold any indication of what this team is capable of.

And it shouldn’t.

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

Contact Laura Myers at lmyers2@nd.edu
they're here for Notre Dame'

Kelly emphasizes physical, mental toughness as he prepares players for roles in field, in community

By MATT GAMBER
Sports Writer

When Brian Kelly was first introduced as Notre Dame’s football coach on Dec. 11, he said he wanted “tough gentlemen” who would represent the University on and off the field. Irish players in need of an example should look no further than their head coach.

In his first four months on campus, Kelly has been making a noticeable effort to increase his program’s visibility within the Notre Dame and South Bend communities. To do so, he’s spoken at a variety of campus events ranging from high school football games to the Junior Parents Weekend Closing Brunch to a student government meeting earlier this week.

Kelly said his program will be “a part of what makes Notre Dame special.” To that end, he said he would not have entered the case before he arrived. So he said the key to his effort to be “approachable” and has emphasized that his players will be true student-athletes, not just a string of names on the rolls of the University community.

“That’s the gentleman: Always in a suit, looking and sounding like a politician than a hard-nosed coach,” he said. “With that in mind, you’d ask Coach to come down, too. I doubt he’s got the ‘tough’ part worked with Kelly, there’s no question he’s got the ‘tough’ part worked with him. That’s who he is,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said.

Still, Kelly has had several other questions. As they work through his program by telling high school players, they’ll have to work to tough to become all-fight-able at Notre Dame. “We’re going to lose kids that way,” he said. “We’re going to lose them. Kelly said, “I want guys that understand that if you’re here, you’re going to get a good- brand at Notre Dame on your degree. That’s the flip side, you’re going to work for it. That’s the kind of guy I want, somebody who recognizes the value of what makes this unique, and that academics and athletics.”

While those academic demands trim the list of play- ers the Irish can target, Kelly and his staff have to draw a much wider net than the previous regime, in terms of offering scholarships to high school prospects. With a limited number of available scholarships — roughly 20 per year — it’s clear the new staff is put ting in the way necessary to recruit effectively.

Kelly said that effort, coupled with Notre Dame’s national recognition, will enable the staff to recruit coast to coast. It’s a new philosophy that has to be made as well.

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There were once questions about whether the University’s tough academic standards inhib ited Notre Dame’s ability to attract top-flight talent, but for- mer coach Charlie Weis dis missed those by consistently reining in high-touted players from around the nation.

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Projected Depth Charts

Charley Molnar
Offensive Coordinator/Quarterbacks

Ed Warinner
Offensive Line

Mike Denbrock
Tight Ends

Tim Hinton
Running Backs

Tony Alford
Wide Receivers

Editor’s Note: The depth charts above are based on spring practice observations.
The Observer

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GAME 2010

depth chart

Bob Diaco
Defensive Coordinator/Inside Linebackers

Mike Elston
Defensive Line/Special Teams Coordinator

Kerry Cooks
Outside Linebackers

Chuck Martin
Defensive Backs

Written by Observer beat writers Matt Gamber, Laura Myers and Douglas Farmer.

GREEN-GOLD GAME,
Irish’s spring football coverage

Available at ndsmcobserver.com/irish-insider
Jones, Rees lead early enrollees into college

By DOUGLAS FARMER
Sports Editor

Freshman early enrollee Tai- ler Jones has spent as much time taking snaps with the first team offense as he has with the second, yet Irish coach Brian Kelly and his coaching staff don’t mind reminding Jones that he is, in many ways, still a high school senior.

“He’s still got the tassel on the car window from graduation. He’s just a young kid,” Kelly said after Saturday’s practice. “He’s got a chance to be a player for us and can contribute this year, but his work volume really tapers off.”

Jones and the four other early enrollees — quarterback Tommy Rees and defensive backs Chris Badger, Spencer Boyd and Lo Wood — have all needed to adapt to a change in lifestyle, both on and off the field. The fact that they can handle that change sets them apart, wide receivers coach Tony Alford said.

“I think it takes a special young guy to come in at semester. You’ve got to be a little more mature for your years to come in,” Alford said earlier in the spring. “These guys right now, their buddies are getting ready for prom. They’re trying to pay somebody to be their date, and these guys are stuck here at college prom. They’re trying to pay for your years and prom dates, Jones said. “It really comes down to pushing myself more during practice, pushing through that wall. In high school I never really got fatigued.”

“[Tai-ler’s] still got the tassel on the car window from graduation. He’s just a young kid.”

Brian Kelly
Irish coach

In that regard, enrolling early may have been the only solution, Molnar said.

“There is no question, enrolling early has helped him a lot,” he said. “Going through winter workouts, getting with strength and conditioning coach Paul Longo, getting with the quarterbacks and the receivers, there is no way he would be ready to play if he came in August.”

Come August, Molnar said Rees could also contribute, knowing Kelly’s penchant for playing many quarterbacks for various reasons.

“He really is made for a spread offense,” Molnar said. “He’s got a quick release, he makes very quick decisions, has quick feet in the pocket. From that standpoint, I think he’s got a real chance to be a player here at Notre Dame.”

The reason to contribute is why the early enrollees left behind graduation ceremonies and prom dates, Jones said.

“When I hit campus, my plan was to make the best of every chance I get, and help the team in any way to win, whether it is on special teams, or second or third on the depth chart,” he said. “Whatever I could do.”

At the least, Jones, Rees and the three defensive backs understand the Irish philosophy with their decision, Alford said.

“It takes a mature guy to do that,” he said. “They’re all doing a good job, and I’m proud of them.”

Contact Douglas Farmer at dfarmer1@nd.edu

New staff gives receivers chance to compete

By LAURA MYERS
Sports Writer

If recent practices are any indication, the first three wide receivers fans will see Saturday will be junior Michael Floyd, senior Duval Kamara and early enrollee freshman Tai- ler Jones. But many others are competing for playing time that wide receivers coach Tony Alford said is anything but secure.

“We’ll see. Guys have to keep making plays,” Alford said. “It’s an ongoing process, and just because you’re there doesn’t mean you’ll be there the next day or if you’re not there doesn’t mean you won’t be there the next day.”

Junior John Goodman and sophomores Theo Riddick and Omar Evans are also looking to be the next three competing for a spot on the first team. As a freshman in 2007, Kamara set receiving records for total receptions and touchdown receptions by a freshman with 32 and four, respectively. His role decreased in the following years, however, as he had to compete with Floyd — who broke both records in 2008 — and with former Irish receiv-

er Golden Tate.

“You’re going to compete, either way, no matter who’s here,” Kamara said. “We had Golden Tate last year, guys had to compete. They had to compete now. It’s no different. We have a bunch of talented guys. You just have to go out there and do what you have to do each day.”

While Jones only arrived on campus in January, he has already made a name for himself, something Alford said was not surprising.

“He’s a competitive guy and that’s why we recruited him,” Alford said. “We didn’t recruit him to come here and sit down, we recruited him to compete and that’s what he’s doing.”

The conversion of the offense from a pro-style offense to a spread offense should allow for more opportunities for the backup receivers to make plays and distinguish themselves.

“You just have to step up and take on the challenge of the new offense, a different offense,” Kamara said. “Just retaining all the plays and everything, you just have to step up and go along with it. I’ve been running the offense for three years.”

Goodman caught six passes for 104 yards in 2009, seeing action in nine games. Evans caught seven passes for 61 yards in six games. Riddick, a running back in 2009, played in 12 games and caught six passes for 43 yards. Goodman has played with the first unit at times during spring practice, but all three have spent most of their time with the second team.

“I think that all those guys have done a great job of compet- ing and really taking the time off the field to learn every- thing and then apply their knowledge off the field to what we’re doing on the field,” junior quarterback Dayne Crist said. “They’ve all got very unique skill sets and they definitely offer something different, but I know they share the commen- sality of wanting to compete and be on the field.”

“Seeing the competitiveness of those guys is really positive and something you want to see at the quarterback spot.”

Crist said he has had time to work with all of the receivers in both the huddle and rhythm with each one, which he said is critical no matter who is on the field.

“It’s good knowing that you’re going to get the cream of the crop at the end of the day and you’re going to get the most competitive guys out there,” he said.

Contact Laura Myers at lmyers2@nd.edu

Senior Duval Kamara leads a pack of receivers vying for playing time in Notre Dame’s new spread offense.
Switch should benefit both Wood and Riddick

By MATT GAMBER
Sports Writer

In one of his first public personnel decisions in early March, Irish coach Brian Kelly said he would move sopho- more Cierre Wood from running back to wide receiver to clear room in the backfield for, among others, Cierre Wood. Riddick was second to only Golden Tate in all-purpose yards for the Irish last season, as he racked up 160 yards rushing and 849 receiving. "Wood has more development to do than most, but he wants to be good and he understands what it's going to take for him to be good," Hinton said. "For Riddick, while his position has changed, his individual coach hasn't. Wide receivers coach Tony Alford coached the running backs last year and was the only assistant retained from Charlie Weis' staff. He said Riddick is far from a finished product but has shown promise while his position has increased workload this spring.

"[Wood] has more development to do than most, but he wants to be good and he understands what it's going to take for him to be good." - Tim Hinton

Irish assistant coach

By DOUGLAS FARMER
Sports Editor

Throughout its first month on campus, the Irish coaching staff focused on the recruiting class that will join Notre Dame in the coming fall. As soon as National Signing Day passed in February, the coaches refocused their efforts on making up the ground lost in recruiting battles for members of the high school class of 2011. "We were way behind after Signing Day — it wasn't just getting through last recruiting season, it was starting our next one," recruiting coordinator Chuck Martin said. "We've caught up to a large extent, and now we've just got to keep plowing away. I really feel like we've closed the gap." With about a dozen recruits visiting campus for the Blue-Gold Game, this weekend could be a big step in closing that gap.

Recruits visit campus before, during weekend

"They aren't going to take a whole lot of wide receivers in this class, maybe two at the most. So getting his commitment would be pretty big, and allow them to focus on other positions." - Frank

The most likely to commit before leaving campus this weekend is linebacker Jarrett Grace, from Cincinnati.

Linebacker Sean Duggan, another Cincinnati native, and offensive lineman Conor Hanratty were both raised on Irish football lore by fathers who graduated from Notre Dame. Hanratty's father, Terry Hanratty, quarterbacked the Irish to the 1966 National Championship. "[Connor] is coming this weekend, and I think he gets in Thursday, so he'll be here awhile," Frank said. "Who knows if he'll pull the trigger or not, but I think Notre Dame has a real good chance at landing him." Quarterback Bubba Starling visited the Irish early in the week, departing Sunday, and afterward listed Notre Dame as one of the top five schools he is considering, along with Alabama, Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma.

"I think Notre Dame has a real good chance at landing him." - Frank

Contact Douglas Farmer at dfarmer@nd.edu
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