LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL
COMMENTARY

Slow down: It’s not time to drink the kool-aid

It is early September in South Bend, which can mean only one thing—the kool-aid is awfully strong.

Notre Dame sits in the top 20 in both of the major polls. Some experts have the Irish as high as the top 10. Sports Illustrated is so bold as to predict Brian Kelly and company will spend January in a BCS bowl game.

The kool-aid has gotten very strong. 9-3 or 10-2 records seem exceedingly plausible. 11-1 isn’t all that much of a reach. And 12-0? Well, it feels closer than it is, but given the 2006 preseason hype.

Remember as a kid, coming in from playing football in the backyard, all you wanted was the sugar high from the kool-aid. You want something different. It is a drink you don’t have to do thing, turn over the ball. That is the Notre Dame football I know, my classmates know and my generation knows. Not a year since has gone by the Irish haven’t lost a game they should have won—Air Force in overtime in 1996, a 23-7 shellacking at the hands of Michigan State the following year, never mind the fact that it was a home game. And don’t ever at me started on the 14-7 loss to Boston College the week after my birthday in 2002. I was at one that, and still try to rub my eyes to get the visions of green jerseys out of them.

Last year it was Navy and Tulsa. Navy and Tulsa, and, for good measure, Navy and Tulsa. This is the Notre Dame I know and love. This is the Notre Dame I expect to see until proven otherwise. This is the Notre Dame I keep coming back to for more.

Albert Einstein once said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results.

For the better part of 15 years, I have drunk the kool-aid yearly. For the better part of 15 years, Notre Dame has made me regret the grape aftertaste. It is time to stop doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. No more kool-aid for me.

Oh no, Mr. Kool-Aid Man. Oh no.

Yes, this is touted as the deepest defensive front Notre Dame has trod out in years. Yes, senior quarterback Dayne Crist is supposedly a more vocal leader these days. Yes, senior receiver Michael Floyd is on a mission to be the best in the country.

But these are annual occurrences, if the names are simply ones we have seen much of that. This is all I have seen when it comes to Notre Dame football.

A small sample size usually leaves fans unfulfilled, but this small sample size only includes dreams dashed, wasted talents and the Bush Push.

I began measuring my breaths by Allen Rossum kick, punt and interception returns and I measured my joys by Joey Goodpaster touchdowns in 1996.

My first bitter tears followed a Ron Powlus fumble in overtime against Air Force that year—just minutes after NBC announcer Ron Hammond warned the one thing you don’t want to do in overtime is turn over the ball.

That is the Notre Dame football I know, my classmates know and my generation knows. Not a year since has gone by the Irish haven’t lost a game they should have won—Air Force in overtime in 1996, a 23-7 shel-}

**FOOTBALL RECRUITING**

OL Goodman visits campus

By DOUGLAS FARMER

Notre Dame’s 2011 season may begin Saturday, but the recruiting season began long ago. Because of that, only one recruit is officially coming to campus this weekend, as of Wednesday night.

Florida offensive lineman Evan Goodman will watch the Irish take on South Florida.

Irish recruiting expert Mike Frank said, “He is a big-time player, a guy who is real high on their list.”

He is currently committed to Arizona State, where he has an older brother playing, but he wants to check out his other options.

A slow opening weekend is not unusual, as high school students are just as busy at the beginning of the year as college students.

“The first weekend there just isn’t a whole lot of guys coming in,” Frank said. “It is [the recruits’] first or second games as well.”

You’ll start to see it for Michigan State or Air Force. USC will be the real big game, with at least 20 recruits coming in.

Even once recruits start pouring in, Goodman will still be unique in many respects. Much of the interest will be from out-of-state students.

“Notre Dame is on a mission to find a lot of skill players,” Frank said. “When they mention skill, they are talking about running backs, defensive backs and wide receivers

Contact Douglas Farmer at dfarmer1@nd.edu

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By ANDREW OWENS
Associate Sports Editor

When Dayne Crist snaps on his helmet and runs out of the tunnel for Notre Dame’s season opener, it will not be the first time he has participated in the Irish pregame ritual. But the senior quarterback will have a different feeling now, having battled back from a season-ending knee injury for the second consecutive year to reclaim the role of starting quarterback.

“More than anything, I just hope [Notre Dame fans] know how much I care and how hard I work to help this team win.”

Dayne Crist
Senior quarterback

“The coaching staff has raved about Crist’s performance in fall practice, both with his attitude and on-field performance. The experience has affected him in a way that a healthy 2010 could not have, offensive coordinator Charlie Molnar said.”

“I would say quite frankly and honestly, [Crist] is the kind of guy I want to coach,” Kelly said. “He’s tough mentally. He handles himself in that leadership position in the way I want our quarterbacks to handle it. We have great confidence in his ability to lead our football team to a championship.”

Brián Kelly
Irish coach

“Having the guys we have on defense makes the quarterback’s job a lot easier, so obviously I need to help those guys because those guys have incredible play-making ability.” Crist said. “I think everybody on this offense has a very aggressive mindset and wants to go out and score a lot of points and that’s the goal of the offense. We’re real excited those guys are back.”

Crist’s ef- fect on the team has improved with an increased vocal leadership and confidence, Molnar said. “I think he is the same guy,” he said. “He is probably more confident than he has been just knowing that he’s the starter and getting virtually all of his reps right now with the first unit. He’s been even sharper than he was leading into him being announced as the starter.”

For Crist, the motivation has always been the same since he signed with Notre Dame as a five-star quarterback in 2008 and battled through two injuries to reach the point he is at today. “More than anything, my love for the game, a love of this University and a love for my teammates motivates me,” he said. “There’s nothing more that I want to do other than play with the rest of the guys on this team and win for this University.”

By ANDREW OWENS
Associate Sports Editor

“More than anything I just hope [Notre Dame fans] know how much I care and how hard I work to help this team win.”

Dayne Crist
Senior quarterback

Crist benefits from leading a defense with several offensive weapons that are big-play threats every time they touch the football, such as senior receiver Michael Floyd and junior tight end Tyler Eifert.

“Having the guys we have on offense makes the quarterback’s job a lot easier, so obviously I need to help those guys because those guys have incredible play-making ability,” Crist said. “I think everybody on this offense has a very aggressive mindset and wants to go out and score a lot of points and that’s the goal of the offense. We’re real excited those guys are back.”

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Crist battles through season-ending injuries and offseason competition to earn the top depth chart spot

A more resilient man

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Crist battles through season-ending injuries and offshore
Allan Joseph
Sports Editor

South Florida is not a familiar name to most Irish fans – but the Bulls cannot be overlooked. Quarterback B.J. Daniels leads a potent offensive attack, and the Bulls are quick on the defensive side of the ball. This will not be an easy test for the Irish – but they are up to the task. Dayne Crist has an embarrassment of targets when he throws the ball, and the ground game will be an effective change of pace. On the other side of the ball, the defensive line will harass Daniels and limit his effectiveness.

It’s a season opener, though, and that will bring some jitters and mishaps with it. The Irish will win, but not quite as comfortably as they could have. The outcome, however, won’t be in doubt.

**Predictions**

**Notre Dame Defense**

| WR | 7 | TJ Jones | So. |
| WR | 6 | Theo Riddick | Jr. |
| WR | 9 | Robby Toma | Sr. |
| LT | 70 | Zack Martin | Jr. |
| LG | 66 | Chris Watt | Jr. |
| RG | 52 | Braxton Cave | Sr. |
| RT | 78 | Trevor Robinson | Sr. |
| TE | 80 | Tyler Eifert | Jr. |
| WR | 6 | Theo Riddick | Jr. |

**Notre Dame Offense**

| WR | 12 | Robert Blanton | Sr. |
| WR | 17 | Zeke Motta | Jr. |
| WR | 26 | Jamoris Slaughter | Sr. |
| WR | 20 | Cierre Wood | Fr. |
| WR | 22 | Harrison Smith | Sr. |
| WR | 27 | Kyle Brindza | Fr. |
| CB | 52 | Braxton Cade | Sr. |
| CB | 45 | Darius Fleming | Sr. |
| CB | 60 | Jordan Coward | Sr. |
| CB | 6 | Theo Riddick | Fr. |

**Notre Dame Specialists**

| PK | 98 | Sean Cychy | Sr. |
| LS | 89 | Kaper Lewis-Moore | Sr. |
| PR | 99 | Aarten Lynch | Jr. |
| KR | 55 | Prince Shembo | So. |
| KO | 4 | Gary Gray | Sr. |

**FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 31, South Florida 21**
**USF Defense**

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<th>CB</th>
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**USF Offense**

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<td>Mark Popek Jr.</td>
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<td>AI Love Sr.</td>
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**USF Specialists**

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**USF Offensive Coaching**

Offensive coordinator Todd Fitch's unit sputtered as the 85th-ranked offense in the country in points per game in 2010, with 24.1. The Bulls struggled with both running and passing the ball, finishing No. 71 and No. 101, respectively. Much of their success against a talented Notre Dame defense will depend on the performance of quarterback B.J. Daniels.

**PREDICTION:** Notre Dame 27, South Florida 10

**USF Rushing**

South Florida lost talented running back Moise Plancher to graduation after rushing for 793 yards and five touchdowns in 2010. The Bulls also enter 2011 returning only seniors Jeremiah Warren and Chaz Hine on the offensive line, so gaining consistent yards on a talented Notre Dame front seven may prove to be difficult.

**USF Passing**

The Bulls return only four starters from an offense that ranked 101st in passing. Senior quarterback B.J. Daniels returns to lead the South Florida passing attack. The 6-foot, 223-pound signal caller started 12 games last year, with mixed results, as he threw 13 interceptions and only 11 touchdowns in those contests.

South Florida lost a starter at wide receiver, its tight end and three offensive linemen from its pass attack. Junior receiver Evan Landi caught 28 passes for 390 yards and 2 touchdowns last season.

Most of Notre Dame's secondary remains intact after a strong finish to the 2010 campaign. Harrison Smith, Gary Gray, Robert Blanton, Jamoris Slaughter and Zeke Motta all started or saw considerable action last season and improved immensely during the course of the season. Smith is viewed as a potential All-American candidate after snagging the game-clinching interception at USC and picking off Miami's Jacory Harris three times in the Sun Bowl.

**EDGE: Notre Dame**

The Irish only lose linebacker Brian Smith and nose guard Ian Hawes from their front seven. The squad went 4-0 in the absence of Williams, who was replaced by nose guards Sean Cwynar and Halis Williams. Louis Nix enters the front seven rotation this year, as do freshmen Aaron Lynch, Stephon Tuitt and Isaiah Williams. The Irish return its most talented group of linebackers in recent memory, with All-American candidate Manti Te'o, Darius Fleming, Prince Shembo and new starter junior Dan Fox, who supplanted Carlo Calabrese as a starting inside linebacker.

**USF Special Teams**

Kicker Maikon Bonani was one of the most consistent kickers in the Big East for the Bulls last season, converting 17-of-17 field goal attempts, with a season-long of 47 yards. Punter Justin Brockhaus-Kann averaged 47.6 yards per punt in 2010, with a long of 52 yards. The Bulls have an explosive return game at both kick returner and punt returner. Punt returner Lindsay Lamar returned two kicks for scores last year.

**EDGE: USF**

The Bulls have an explosive return game at both kick returner and punt returner. Punt returner Lindsay Lamar returned two kicks for scores last year.

**FINAL SCORE:** Notre Dame 31, South Florida 13

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Andrew Owens
Associate Sports Editor

South Florida has no shortage of speed on its team, and should not be taken lightly. They entered 2011 as one of the favorites to win the Big East after finishing with an 8-5 record that was identical to Notre Dame’s in 2010.

The Bulls will keep it close in the first half, but their inability to move the ball against a top-notch Irish defense will lead to an excellent field position for a Notre Dame offense with plenty of playmakers.

The Irish defense will be the best Notre Dame fans have seen since the ’90s — even better than the 2002 unit that carried the team to a 10-win season, and it all starts with a dominating performance against a worthy opponent. Manti Te’o will anchor the defense to top-15 finishes in every major category.

**PREDICTION:** Notre Dame 27, South Florida 10

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Chris Masoud
Assistant Managing Editor

Notre Dame’s defensively difficult schedule begins this Saturday with a legitimate test in the form of South Florida. Dame Crist’s return to the offense brings back the deep game, setting up an interesting matchup with the experienced Bulls secondary. Skip Holtz’s long-awaited return to Notre Dame may be a welcome sight to some Irish fans, but I would have liked to see someone with a different last name.

Actually, Holtz is a good coach because he’s a good coach, and South Florida is a good team because of B.J. Daniels. As long as the defensive line holds, the outside backers keep containment and Manti Te’o introduces himself to Daniels, the Irish should run away with the first win of the year.

**FINAL SCORE:** Notre Dame 31, South Florida 13
Skip Holtz downplays his return to Notre Dame

By ALLAN JOSEPH
Sports Editor

When Skip Holtz was hired as the head coach of South Florida in early January 2010, Irish fans immediately circled Sept. 3, 2011, on their calendars as the date on which a Holtz would once again be prowling the sidelines of Notre Dame Stadium. But if you ask Skip Holtz, his homecoming is just one of the many subplots in the season opener — and it’s no more important than any of the others.

“I just need to keep in perspective that the game is much bigger for South Florida than it is for Skip Holtz.”

Skip Holtz
South Florida coach

Holtz said in a press conference last week. “But Notre Dame playing South Florida is much bigger than Skip Holtz returning.”

Holtz’s roots in South Bend stretch back to his search for a college at a time when Gerry Faust coached the Irish and Skip’s father, Lou, was the head coach at Arkansas, yet to take the reins of the Notre Dame program. Holtz visited campus during high school as a prospective football and basketball player.

“[Lou] was giving a speech in Chicago, and then we went and took a day in South Bend and we met with coach Faust and [former Irish basketball coach] Digger Phelps and toured the campus,” Holtz said. “I fell in love with it and I said, ‘This is where I want to go to school.’”

Holtz visited campus during high school as a prospective football and basketball player.

While he was not admitted directly to the University, Holtz spent two years at Holy Cross before transferring to Notre Dame and walking onto the football team during his father’s first year at the helm. He spent one year on the team before graduating and spending time at Florida State as a graduate assistant and at Colorado State as the wide receivers coach.

In 1990, Holtz returned to Notre Dame Stadium as an assistant to his father in a position that would springboard him to his first head-coaching job at Connecticut. Nevertheless, Holtz credits his success to more than just his time at Notre Dame.

“Obviously we are who we are because of the experiences we have had,” he said. “Lou Holtz has been a huge influence in my life. He and [former Florida State coach] Bobby Bowden and [former Colorado State coach] Earle Bruce have shaped me.”

Now that he has the reins of his own BCS-conference program, however, Holtz said he plans to focus only on the aspects of his homecoming that will help his Bulls avoid being overwhelmed.

“I’ll talk about Touchdown Jesus and the traditional things on campus and explain what they’re walking into,” Holtz said. “It will be more of an educational purpose — I don’t want them to be oohed and aahed. … It will be more facts about the Stadium and the history than my personal experiences.”

With so much of his personal history tied up with Notre Dame football, Holtz admits he will have to maintain resolve in order to keep his emotions in check.

“I just need to keep in perspective that the game is much bigger for South Florida than it is for Skip Holtz,” he said. “I’ll have to put my enthusiasm in being back on the back shelf. We’ll start talking and addressing Notre Dame and its personnel and talking about playing at Notre Dame.”

Contact Allan Joseph at ajoseph2@nd.edu
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