THE FIRST STEP

THE IRISH HEAD OVERSEAS TO BEGIN THE 2012 SEASON AGAINST NAVY IN DUBLIN

Photo Illustration by Susanna Pratt and Brandon Keelican
Golson selection not enough

By Allan Joseph

Dublin — Don’t do it. Just don’t. Don’t take any more time to consider the selection of sophomore Everett Golson as the starting quarterback for Notre Dame.

I’m all for getting excited about it, but the truth is stark: Golson is not the solution to all of Notre Dame’s woes. He will not be a Heisman contender, a regular-season winner, or even a champion, or even 10 of Notre Dame’s woes. He will make mistakes.

If the new starter does not exceed every impossible high expectation, he can’t touch this team’s biggest liability: its defensive secondary. The success of the 2012 season probably depends more on another starter named last Thursday: freshman KeiVarae Russell, who will start at corner back following the loss of Lo Wood to injury.

Even if Golson turns in 12 impeccable performances this year, this team just won’t win games. It will make mistakes.

None of this is to say Golson isn’t a significant upgrade for Notre Dame. Every piece of evidence we have — including, yes, that insane high school highlight reel — suggests he’ll provide an immediate dose of dynamism to an Irish offense sorely in need of it. I wouldn’t be surprised to see him win a game or two on his own after he’s settled into the starting role.

His ceiling is sky-high, and it’s positively scary to think of what he could become by the time his senior day rolls around.

But for now, recognize this: Golson is not the end to Notre Dame’s problems. He is not the savior of the 2012 season.

Throughout the year, he’ll probably be up and down, and he’ll probably make more than a few highlight-reel plays. But you can count on one thing: He will make mistakes.

International exposure entices Irish recruits

By Chris Allen

The Irish enter the 2012 season having already assembled a competitive 2013 recruiting class of 19 players, including five ESPN 150 talents. Though National Signing Day is in the books, Irish coach Brian Kelly and his staff have built a class that ranks No. 8 nationally in ESPN’s class rankings.

Irish recruiting expert Mike Frank said the Irish recruiters outfitted expectations in the summer signing period.

“[Recruiting] has gone even better than I had expected it would,” said Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliated Irish Sports Daily. “Where they’re at, with so many top-ranked players already committed, they’ve done an excellent job in getting some of the best players on campus. It doesn’t even stop with 2013, but they’ve even identified people for different spots on campus. They’ve surpassed many expectations.”

Highlighting the class is the June 2 commitments of super-prospect outside linebacker Jaylon Smith, who chose the Irish over Ohio State. Smith, ranked No. 4 on ESPN’s No. 150 and a five-star prospect on some recruiting services, is the highest-ranked Irish recruit at linebacker since current senior and captain Manti Te’o.

The Fort Wayne, Ind., product is the centerpiece of a recruiting class that includes ESPN’s No. 63 prospect Alex Anzalone. Frank said he loves the versatility Smith will bring to the Irish’ future Irish defensive corps.

“Ultimately, everybody has gone even better than I had expected it would,” Frank said. “To me he is someone who is a four-star if not a high-four star player. Isaac Rochell committed early in June so people forget about him, but at the defensive end position he is also going to be a top-notch player for this coaching staff.”

Having already built a stellar class, the Irish now turn to Dublin and the season opener. The Emerald Isle Classic will feature a handful of high school football games in advance of the clash between Notre Dame and Navy. While there are several top players playing in those lead-up games who may lean Irish after the event, Frank said the real recruiting event would come from recruits who see the program’s international exposure.

“What will be evident to recruits who are over there and those who are watching on television is just how strong the fan base is,” he said. “There are going to be 40,000 Notre Dame fans over in a foreign country, and there are very few teams that could pull that off. I can only think of a couple that have that kind of fan support.”

“So for recruits across the country, Notre Dame has a big interest in showing the kind of international exposure that the program has, and the kinds of events a player participates in at Notre Dame.”

Frank said the opportunity to experience a major event in a foreign country would be an attractive opportunity to a recruit despite the grueling travel and unfamiliar surroundings.

“I think some of them would probably rather play in front of their friends and family in a familiar environment, but they will sacrifice one game for the incredible experience.”

For more on Notre Dame recruiting, check out Mike Frank’s irishsportsdaily.com.

Email Mike at mike@irishsportsdaily.com and tell him The Observer sent you.

Contact Chris Allen at callen10@nd.edu

Follow all the action online at ndsmcobserver.com
The Observer will cover the game live from Dublin.

"[Recruiting] has gone even better than I had expected it would."
Mike Frank
Irish recruiting expert

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Observer.
By ANDREW OWENS
Assistant Managing Editor

DUBLIN — The Fighting Irish in Ireland. It is a rare occasion that Notre Dame is able to celebrate its athletic identity in Ireland. Most assume the iconic moniker has always represented the program, but in reality that identity was not made official until 1927, according to University archives.

Earlier in its history, Notre Dame would compete athletically against local colleges, with press reports referring to teams by the school’s religion. Although the entire roster was not composed of Catholic players or men of Irish descent, the team was typically referred to as the Catholics or the Irish. Despite others using the nickname as a slur, Notre Dame embraced it. After all, it served as a reminder of the school’s heritage: more than a name, a symbol.

The festivities surrounding the Emerald Isle Classic, the biggest tour to the Emerald Isle in a generation, bring an international flavor to teams by the school’s religion. It’s not a big fan of playing football games in Ireland.

Notre Dame embraces Irish roots with Dublin opener, faces logistical challenges

The Irish coach Brian Kelly said his primary concern is how the trip — and the quick turnaround — affects the players later in September.

“Whereas Kelly views the weekend as a business trip, Holtz saw it as a learning experience. He led the team on a trip to a monastery and a lecture at Trinity College and had players keep a journal of the trip as a way to remember the weekend.”

As a sign of the times, the 1996 game — played at 8 a.m. EST — was tape-delayed by CBS until noon. With the majority of the TV timeouts eliminated from the broadcast, the game concluded in less than three hours.

“I enjoy playing the game on TV, but liked it without the TV timeouts,” Holtz said. “If NBC is interested in televising our games, I think it would be tremendous.”

Though the Emerald Isle Classic, the 1996 Shamrock Classic was regarded at the time as the biggest tourist event in Dublin history, with an estimated $25 million pumped into the Irish economy.

As in 1996, the student body will be largely absent from the festivities on the other side of the Atlantic in 2012. With the price tag of a trip to Dublin a hefty one and no interruption from the academic schedule, most students will watch the game in the early morning from the comfort of their residence halls and off-campus apartments and houses.

But when the group of fans that does travel abroad packs up and heads home Sunday, the trip will become a memory, a treasured link to the past and a reminder of some of the University’s fundamental roots an ocean away.

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NDMCONSERVER.COM | FRIDAY, AUGUST 31, 2012 | THE OBSERVER
NAVY PASSING

No, that’s not a misprint. The two words a couple lines up do indeed say “NAVY Passing.” Although due to Navy’s option offense, the Midshipmen’s passing attack is nearly non-existent.

Despite the structure of the offense, look for Navy to pass the ball slightly more than in years past under the direction of new junior quarterback Trey Miller. Miller is a better passer than former Navy signal caller Kris Proctor, who ran for more yards than he threw for last year. Irish fans should recognize Miller from more yards than he threw for last year.

NAVY RUSHING

The triple option has been Navy’s equalizer for years now in its attempt to compete with the big boys of college football. The deceptive and quick option had handed Notre Dame losses in three of the previous four meetings before last year’s rout. In the 42-point victory over the Midshipmen last year, the Irish defense seemed to have the option figured out, holding Navy to 196 yards on 50 carries.

While the system remains the same, the personnel has changed a lot for Navy. It lost Proctor and former fullback Alexander Teich, their top two rushers last season who combined for nearly 2,000 yards on the ground. Senior slot back Gee Gee Greene is Navy’s top returning rusher after racking up more than 500 yards.

Notre Dame’s front seven, led by All-American senior linebacker Manti Te’o and mammoth sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt, is now a cohesive unit capable of containing Navy’s rushing game.

The deep rotation of defensive linemen that includes junior Louis Nix and graduate student Karon Lewis-Moore should be able to withstand Navy’s notorious cut blocks at the line of scrimmage.

Navy will be assured of large rushing numbers Saturday. Whether they are effective, though, is a different question.

EDGE: EVEN

NAVY OFFENSIVE COACHING

Navy coach Ken Niumatalolo has taken the Midshipmen to new heights against Notre Dame in recent years and will have his guys mentally prepared for the season opener. But Notre Dame defensive coordinator Bob Diaco has faced three triple option teams since the Navy debacle in 2010 and shut them all down.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

NAVY SPECIAL TEAMS

Navy entered camp not with a quarter-back controversy but with a kicker controversy. The Midshipmen named freshman Nick Sloan the placekicker this past week despite inconsistent performances in practice. Sloan’s inexperience could hurt Navy if the Midshipmen keep this game close until the end.

In the return game, Navy brings back junior Marcus Thomas and senior Bo Snelson to handle kickoff duties while junior Shawn Lynch will make his debut at punt return. Thomas was solid a year ago, averaging 22 yards per return and scoring a touchdown.

EDGE: EVEN

NAVY SCHEDULE

Sept. 1 vs. Notre Dame
Sept. 15 @ Penn State
Sept. 22 @ VMI
Sept. 29 San Jose State
Oct. 6 @ Air Force
Oct. 12 Central Michigan
Indiana
Oct. 20 @ East Carolina
Nov. 10 Texas State
Dec. 8 vs. Army

Typically the anticipation of the season opener carries with it a rosy outlook. Each team’s record is unblemished, and surely this is the year everything comes together for your favorite program. In 2012, however, Saturday’s season opener should be more of a sigh of relief that the international aspect of this game does not excite their whole lives. I get the sense from talking to players that the reality is much easier than that, even with the loss of two starters to suspension. Notre Dame has come a long way from the debacle in the Meadowlands two years ago, and Navy has since lost Ricky Dobbs. The Irish defense is much more disciplined, and Everett Golson is running an offense that’s finally comfortable with the Brian Kelly system.

From my perspective, I’m considering the hype around this game, Navy might give Notre Dame a scare for a quarter or so. But it won’t last much longer than that. It’s going to be one amazing Irish party in Aviva Stadium.
IRISH PASSING

Much like Navy, Notre Dame will be ushering in a new era under center with a mobile and inexperience signal caller. After surviving a four-man quarterback derby, sophomore quarterback Everett Golson will take his first snap as Notre Dame’s starter against Navy. While fans have not seen Golson in action since the Blue-Gold Game in April, he promises to add arm strength and a running dimension to the Notre Dame offense.

Golson will not have the benefit of throwing to departed receiver Michael Floyd but he will have something close in senior tight end Tyler Eifert. The Irish coaching staff plans on using the 6-foot-6 Fort Wayne, Ind., native in a variety of ways this season, including split out wide against smaller defenders. His versatility and athleticism will cause fits for Navy’s undersized secondary, whose biggest starter weighs in at just 196 pounds.

Expect some mistakes out of Golson but his receiving corps should be too much for the Midshipmen.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH RUSHING

Last year, Notre Dame ran for an unreal seven touchdowns against Navy. Amazingly enough, due to graduation and suspensions, sophomore running back George Atkinson (and his two punt returns during the regular season) is the only player on Saturday’s roster that scored in the six-touchdown romp. Atkinson will see plenty of carries as the bigger back while senior Theo Riddick will earn the lion’s share of action after senior Cierre Wood’s suspension. Golson’s ability to run should also pose outside linebacker issues for the Navy defense.

Despite the lack of returning experience in the backfield, Notre Dame has one big advantage — literally. The Irish offensive line returns four players who saw significant playing time during last season’s eight-win campaign. Anchored by graduate student center Braxton Cave, the offensive line has only one member under 300 pounds. The Midshipmen, meanwhile, have no players weighing more than 300 pounds.

The Navy front seven also suffered a big blow when projected starter and sophomore outside linebacker suffered a knee injury that will keep him out an extended period. A defense that gave up 442 total yards to the Irish last October needed all the help it could get.

The Irish would be hard-pressed to top last year’s total of seven rushing touchdowns but running the ball against an undersized front should not be an issue.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

After two years under Brian Kelly, the Irish will finally be running an offense that resembles his regimes at Central Michigan and Cincinnati. Golson’s versatility will give Notre Dame additional options in Kelly’s spread offense.

Navy, meanwhile, has given up at least 38 points in three of its last eight games, dating back to last year.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

Senior kicker Nick Tausch will make his return to the playing field after the departure of David Ruffer and a solid camp, according to the coaching staff. Following a rough start to last season, senior Ben Turk continuously improved as the season progressed although the Irish may not need him much Saturday — Notre Dame punted just once during last year’s game.

Irish fans will be delighted to see familiar face George Atkinson (and his two touchtowudch returns from 2011) returning kickoffs while freshman Davonte’ Neal will handle the punt return duties. Notre Dame managed just three total yards on punt returns during the regular season in 2011.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH SCHEDULE

sept. 1 vs. Navy
sept. 8 vs. Purdue
sept. 15 vs. Michigan St.
sept. 22 vs. Miami
oct. 6 vs. Stanford
oct. 13 vs. Boston College
nov. 10 @ Wake Forest
nov. 17 vs. Pittsburgh
nov. 24 vs. USC

Since last season there have been a lot of headlines swirling around the Irish, and most of them have nothing to do with football. Key players leaving the program, suspensions to big names, controversial jersey designs and even a trip to play the season opener across the pond. The real question is: Are the Irish prepared for the season?

With all the distractions, we will see very soon how much this Irish team has progressed and matured since last season there have been a lot of headlines dating back to last year.

Irish football will aim to against a service academy in the season opener. For a team that has been a foil for the Midshipmen, the hype surrounding this game, its setting, its shoes and its quarterbacks have overshadowed some simple facts: Notre Dame will be starting a first-year quarterback without its starting running back while trotting out an inexperienced secondary. Good thing none of that matters when you play Navy’s porous run defense and its option attack on offense.

Everett Golson will make some mistakes but he can afford to against a service academy in the season opener.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 30, Navy 10
Traditionally, team captains are the vocal engines of a well-oiled machine. As the focal points of a huddle, they bolster their teammates in practice and roar across the white lines before and after the whistle.

But Notre Dame’s four captains — linebacker Manti Te’o, tight end Tyler Eifert, offensive tackle Zack Martin and defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore — were at a loss for words, simply humbled as the next to be added to the exclusive index of Irish captaincy.

“I wasn’t expecting it to be honest with you,” Te’o said. “I wasn’t really thinking about it. I was really humbled. I never thought it would happen. It was just [a kid] coming from Hawaii, trying to make his name, do well in football and help his team win.”

Irish coach Brian Kelly and the rest of the coaching staff delivered the unexpected announcement Monday after practice.

“I think what struck me more than anything else is when they got up before their teammates and the things they said about being a captain at Notre Dame,” Kelly said. “In one particular instance, [Lewis-Moore] was brought to tears. You love to see the passion and love for Notre Dame and their teammates.”

Even the usually vociferous Lewis-Moore was stunned. The same lineman who quickly became known as the unofficial voice of the Leprechaun Legion for his intimidating antics in the front row of basketball games this past year struggled to find the words to describe his emotions.

“I was just thinking about five years ago coming here as a 225-pound supposedly outside linebacker and now it is just an unbelievable journey,” he said. “The whole day was just a big emotion for me. Thinking how far I’ve come and what I’ve been through.”

After recording a career-high 62 tackles in 2010, the graduate student senior suffered a season-ending knee injury Oct. 22 during the 31-17 loss to USC. But Lewis-Moore said neither the injury nor his newfound captivity will change his mentalitiy heading into his final season with the Irish.

“I really can’t explain it. It’s something I’m so humbled about. Being here for five years, it’s like a dream come true. It’s a big responsibility but I am going to keep being me … I’m just going to keep being Kapron-Lewis Moore. I’m going to keep being loud, keep bringing the energy. I might do a couple dance moves.”

Te’o, a consensus preseason All-American after consecutive 125-plus tackle seasons, issued a similar vow in hopes of inspiring his teammates after turning down a projected first-round selection in April’s NFL Draft.

“I think a captain is just a title. That’s just a title you’re given. For me, I’ve always tried to be a great leader,” he said. “I love the title of being captain doesn’t change the way I do things. I’m still going to try to [help] my teammates the best way I know how, both on and off the field and be an example to them and just do what I can to help us win.”

Like Te’o, Martin has started every game the past two seasons. A model of consistency at left tackle, Martin flatly denied being the rah-rah member of an offensive line that cleared the way for a rushing attack averaging 4.8 yards per carry in 2011.

“I would say I am more of an example guy,” Martin said. “Maybe more vocal to the O-line where I need to be vocal, I will be. But besides that I will be an example guy.”

Eifert said he walks a similar route as the left tackle he often lines up next to. The 6-foot-6, 225-pound supposedly outside tight end had a breakout 2011 with 803 receiving yards and five touchdowns and 90 receptions, earning him a finalist nomination for the John Mackey Award given to the nation’s top tight end.

“It’s pretty cool to be a captain. I’ve never really even dreamed of being in this position, but it’s great to actually be a captain. It’s really quite an honor,” Eifert said. “I told [the team] that they can expect the same thing that I’ve done my whole time here and that I’m going to come to work every day with a positive attitude and a good work ethic. I just want to be someone who can be reliable and accountable.”

Te’o, meanwhile, said the biggest honor wasn’t the proverbial “C” he received from his coaches, but the encouragement and support he received from his teammates just before his last season opener in an Irish uniform.

“It’s one thing to be named captain, but it’s another thing for your teammates to come up to you and tell you that you deserve it.”

Manti Te’o Irish linebacker

“It’s one thing to be named captain, but it’s another thing for your teammates to come up to you and tell you that you deserve it.”

—Manti Te’o

Senior linebacker Manti Te’o approaches a blocker in the 56-14 Irish win over Navy on Oct. 29, 2011. Te’o was selected by Irish coach Brian Kelly to serve as one of four captains during the 2012 season.
Navy triple option to challenge defense

By MATTHEW DeFRANKS
Associate Sports Editor

Before last season’s 56-14 drubbing of Navy, Notre Dame had lost three of the previous four games against the Midshipmen because of one key culprit — the triple option.

In the three losses, the Irish failed to hold Navy to less than 35 points twice and allowed the Midshipmen to rush for at least 257 yards in each victory.

Since Oct. 23, 2010, when Navy beat Notre Dame 35-17, Irish defensive coordinator Bob Diaco has seemed to figure out how to stop the triple option. The Irish have played three option teams since then (Army, Air Force and Navy again) and earned three victories, winning by an average of nearly 31 points.

Heading into this year’s opener, Navy will be breaking in a new quarterback after losing departed signal caller Kriss Proctor, who was the only Midshipmen player to top 1,000 yards on the ground in 2011.

Junior Trey Miller will take the reins of the option attack for the Midshipmen.

Miller earned his first and only career start against Notre Dame during Navy’s 42-point loss a year ago. Miller was 5-for-13 for 33 yards through the air while rushing for 55 yards during the defeat.

Navy will not only need Miller’s production on the ground but also his prowess through the air to keep the Irish from stacking the box against the Midshipmen’s green backfield.

Senior slot back Gee Gee Greene, however, will help stabilize a Navy offense under new direction.

“Greene makes their offense have that ability to get on the perimeter,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said. “So it’s going to be a great opportunity for us. I’m excited to see our football team play.”

Greene, who caught four touchdown passes in 2011, is also a threat to catch the ball out of the backfield. With leading returning receiver Brandon Turner not traveling with the team, Greene’s 11 receptions from a year ago are the most by any Midshipman playing in Dublin on Saturday.

Unlike most offenses, Navy’s attack features four players (the quarterback, the fullback and the two slot backs) that will carry the ball. Their scheme relies on misdirection and deception that has fooled the Irish before.

“[Navy is a] very difficult opponent to play, especially in your opener, but anytime,” Kelly said. “Ken Niumatalolo, great coach, obviously does as well as anybody in the country at taking his talent and getting it to execute on both sides of the ball, and they have shown that they can do that week in and week out.”

Navy also loses former fullback Alexander Teich, who torched Notre Dame two years ago for 210 yards in helping the Midshipmen compile 367 rushing yards. Unproven sophomore Noah Copeland will try to replace Teich at fullback. Copeland had only two carries during his freshman campaign.

Starting opposite Greene at the other slot back position will be senior John Howell, who had 340 yards rushing last season.

The Irish will try to stop the triple option for the second straight year when they open their season against the Midshipmen on Saturday morning at 9 a.m.
Conviction & Compromise:
BEING A PERSON OF FAITH IN A LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

SEPT. 4, 2012
7:00 P.M. EDT

Leighton Concert Hall,
DeBartolo Performing Arts Center

The 2012–13 Notre Dame Forum begins with a panel discussion featuring some of the nation’s most prominent religious leaders.

CO-MODERATED BY:
DAVID CAMPBELL
Professor of Political Science

M. CATHLEEN KAVENY
The John P. Murphy Foundation Professor of Law and Professor of Theology

This is a free but ticketed event. Those presenting a valid Notre Dame, Saint Mary’s College, or Holy Cross College ID may obtain two tickets per person from the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center ticket office window beginning Wednesday, Aug. 29. Beginning Friday, Aug. 31, two tickets per person will also be available to the general public. Please visit the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center ticket office during regular ticket office hours, noon–6 p.m. Monday–Friday. Note that the ticket office will be closed on Monday, Sept. 3, in observance of Labor Day.