Dublin on Saturday.

Pronged rushing effort, Notre Dame with George, [senior running back] had back trey miller a yard short of first quarter, sophomore Ishaq Everett. It was the third consecutive fumble return since Steve Lawrence's record the longest Irish fumble in school history. It was the third longest in school history.

I think the story for me was being able to control both lines offensively and defensively," said Irish coach Brian Kelly, whose squad is well-coached and it's not a physical group, a great scheme, said. "We're very blessed with running back ciierre Wood, said. "We believe we've got physical ability and doing the little things." Kelly said. "I think it's a cumulative effect of everybody coming together and doing the little things." Twoteny Irish players saw their first collegiate game action in the 40-point blowout as a way to build depth moving forward this season. Kelly said. "We got a lot of young players valuable experience today to go along with our veterans on our football team," he said. Navy mastered its only touchdown on the first series of the third quarter on a three-play, 75-yard drive that culminated in a 25-yard strike from Miller to receiver Shawn Lynch. All three plays on the drive were passes.

Despite the big plays allowed by the inexperienced Irish secondary — which includes KeiVarae Russell, the first cornerback to start as a freshman in school history — Kelly said he was pleased with the unit’s play. "I thought they did some good things," he said. "I was really excited about their ability to go out and compete. Regarding experience..."
REPORT CARD

QUARTERBACKS
B
Making his first start, Everett Golson impressed with 144 yards and his first career touchdown pass in the second quarter. More importantly, the sophomore didn't make any major mistakes besides a red-zone interception.

RUNNING BACKS
A
The Irish have not rushed for more yards in a game since 2003 and were without their starter in Cierre Wood. Theo Riddick and George Atkinson led the dominant rushing attack which accumulated 293 yards on 46 carries.

RECEIVERS
B
Three receivers made their first career receptions as the young receiving corps made some key blocks on the perimeter to help out the rushing attack. Although, a few dropped passes marred a near-stellar effort.

OFFENSIVE LINE
A
The front five dominated the trenches throughout the game, taking pressure off Golson and helping the Irish rush the Midshipmen. That makes 12 rushing TDs for the Irish in team’s last two meetings.

DEFENSIVE LINE
A
Louis Nix and Stephon Tuitt each recorded three tackles, including 2.5 tackles for a loss. The line set up camp in the Navy backfield, constantly disrupted the triple-option. And Tuitt even returned a fumble 77 yards for a score.

LINEBACKERS

What most considered the strongest part of this Irish defense certainly lived up to the hype. Led by preseason All-American Manti Te‘o — who recorded both his first fumble recovery and interception — the Irish limited Navy in its lowest rushing output in almost two years.

DEFENSIVE BACKS
C-
The supposed weakness coming into the season on defense certainly looked like it. The secondary was caught out of position often and gave up 192 yards to a triple-option attack.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The kicking game couldn’t do much, muffing two extra points, which could prove to be crucial in close games. On a good note, Davonte Neal nearly quadrupled Notre Dame’s 2011 regular season punt return yards with an 11-yard return.

COACHING
B+
The Irish coaching staff did enough to stifle the triple-option attack and ease into the Golson era smoothly.

OVERALL GPA: 3.1

Putting up 50 points was definitely a plus for the Irish and the strong running game took a lot of pressure off Everett Golson. But there are some glaring weaknesses for the Irish, with the biggest being the performance of the secondary against a pass-relevant team. Things won’t be this easy against the likes of Landry Jones and Matt Barkley.

PLAY OF THE GAME

STEPHON TUITT’S 77-YARD FUMBLE RETURN FOR A TOUCHDOWN
Following a red-zone interception, Navy put together its first threatening drive, consisting of 12 plays for 68 yards. But with 2:12 left in the second quarter, Tuitt picked up Trey Miller’s fumble — caused by interior pressure from the Irish defensive line — and took it to the endzone to give the Irish an insurmountable 27-0 lead before the half.

Notre Dame displays newfound confidence

DUBLIN — There are plenty of reasons to see Notre Dame’s season-opening victory over Navy as some sort of fluke. The Midshipmen are young and not at their best. The Irish secondary showed some glaring holes. The Irish benefited from turnovers on lucky bounces. To look at the game that way, however, is to miss the forest for the trees.

Saturday’s contest was a promising step for the rest of the season and beyond. Two years ago, in the midst of Brian Kelly’s first season at the helm, the Irish played sloppily in every facet of the game. Simple run blocking was nearly impossible, the defense missed an astounding number of assignments and you could forget about the quarterback consistently throwing catchable passes. The Irish had their occasional moments of brilliance — such as a gutsy win at USC — but overall, they were in a pretty sorry state.

If the 50-10 victory over Navy was any indication, this season promises to be a different experience. It started in the trenches. The Notre Dame offensive front used to be not much more than a speed bump for opposing defenders, and a small one at that. Now, led by captain Zack Martin, the line seems to relish pushing defensive linemen around; running backs Theo Riddick and George Atkinson can attest to the width of the holes they got to run through this weekend. The Irish defensive line a few years ago was supposed to be impressively strong and quick; it turned out to be neither. Now, athletes like Stephon Tuitt and Kapron Lewis-Moore can go both through and around blockers — and as Tuitt demonstrated, they’re pretty fast too.

The success of the offensive and defensive fronts meant the Irish could establish a rhythm in the rushing attack, and the ability of Notre Dame receivers to block on the perimeter meant Riddick and Atkinson had room to break big plays open like Atkinson’s 56-yard touchdown scamper. With a talented line leading the way, the Irish defense could pressure the quarterback, stop short-yardage runs and even force turnovers. None of these were regular occurrences just two years ago.

Obviously, Notre Dame has a bevy of aspects to improve upon as well. The secondary has to do a better job of adjusting to new wrinkles. There were too many dropped passes. The special teams were positively atrocious, with two missed extra points and some scary moments at both ends of punts. But this time, Irish fans can start believing those things will actually get better, because for the first time since 2003, Notre Dame is playing with true confidence.

Last year’s squad thought it had the potential to win every game, but it didn’t expect to. There’s a different vibe coming from this group. Whether it’s Navy or USC, Wake Forest or Oklahoma, this team will go into the game expecting to win; they’ll work on everything and anything to do so. It’s been too long since that type of atmosphere pervaded the Irish locker room.

It’ll still be a year filled with ups and downs. The schedule is too tough to expect the nascent confidence to translate into a BCS berth. Mistakes will be made, weaknesses will be exposed and the Irish will lose a few games. If you replay the Emerald Isle Classic in your head, though, you’ll see a swagger about the Irish you might not recognize. They’re not back yet, but they’re on their way. Don’t miss the forest for the trees.

Contact Allan Joseph at ajoseph2@nd.edu
Irish running backs step up

By ANDREW OWENS
Assistant Managing Editor

DOUBLIN — In the absence of 1,000-yard rusher Cierre Wood to suspension, Notre Dame relied on a running back who started at receiver the past two seasons and a sophomore whose only extensive experience is on kickoff returns.

The result was a 50-10 Irish win, achieved by Notre Dame dominating Navy at what the Midshipmen do best: running the football.

Starting running back Theo Riddick—who dabbled at running back as a freshman before moving to the slot position in 2010 and 2011—has returned to the position at which he feels most comfortable and, in Week One, the results were dazzling.

His 108 yards and two touchdowns on 19 carries, coupled with sophomore George Atkinson’s 99 yards and two touchdowns on nine carries, powered the Irish offense and relieved the load on first-time starter Everett Golson’s shoulders.

Riddick and Atkinson have created aoyed a scrutinized situation atop the depth chart—a good problem for Irish coach Brian Kelly to have. While Riddick won’t be confused as a power back a la Jonas Gray or Robert Hughes, his contributions in the short-yardage game were paramount in the Irish win.

“It keeps me motivated and brings that ‘want to’ in terms of wanting to get another touch-down,” Riddick said. “We were very confident today. We knew what we had to do. We came in with a great, great gameplan.”

Atkinson’s 56-yard first-quarter touchdown jaunt displayed some of the electricity that allowed him to make an impact on special teams during his freshman season in 2011.

“So much for first-game jitters,” he said, “I was excited.”

Atkinson said, “Don’t you want to come in thinking about negative things; you want to think about how you can be successful.”

With and Riddick serving as the team’s thunder and lighting in Wood’s absence, what role does that provide for Wood and inbound running back Amir Carlisle in the Irish attack?

“I don’t know, we’re going to see though,” Atkinson said. “I can’t wait when all of us are on the field together.”

With Wood watching the game on television from South Bend and Riddick confounding the Midshipmen defense, Kelly said future starting decisions will be made based on future production.

“Everybody has an opportunity to contribute. Those are teammates that we respect and we’ll count on them as we move forward,” said Kelly regarding the four players suspended for the season under Kelly regarding the four players suspended for the season.

Kelly said the jumbled offense has an opportunity to contribute. Those are teammates that we respect and we’ll count on them as we move forward, said Kelly regarding the four players suspended for the season.

“Everybody has an opportunity to contribute. Those are teammates that we respect and we’ll count on them as we move forward, said Kelly regarding the four players suspended for the season.

“We can stretch it out and we can run,” Riddick said. “I think (Saturday was) a real coming out for our team. Usually we struggled in the first game in previous years. Today we did very well.”

With Wood and Carlisle’s return on the horizon, it might just be the tip of the iceberg.

Contact Andrew Owens at ao Owens@nd.edu

Golson, Kelly extend streak

By ALLAN JOSEPH
Editor-in-Chief

DOUBLIN — Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson made his first start Sunday, completing 12 of 18 passes for 144 yards, one touchdown and one interception. In the win, Golson extended an impressive streak for Irish coach Brian Kelly. In each of his last six games with a new starter under center, Kelly has emerged a winner. The last game to win his first start under Kelly was junior quarterback Tommy Rees, who started in Notre Dame’s 28-23 Senior Day victory over No. 15 Utah in 2010.

Before Rees, Dayne Crist won his first start in that same season, leading the Irish to victory over Purdue in the 2010 season opener.

Offensive reversals

In 2010, Notre Dame gave up 367 rushing yards to the Midshipmen, who normally outrush the Irish due to a rush-heavy triple-option attack. Navy recorded just 149 yards on the ground in Saturday’s contest, its lowest total since the 2010 season. The Midshipmen did throw for 192 yards at 9.7 yards per attempt.

The Irish rolled up 293 yards on the ground, their biggest total since a 320-yard rushing output against Stanford in 2003. They added 192 yards through the air, normally their primary method of moving the ball.

Contact Allan Joseph at ajoseph2@nd.edu

SCORING SUMMARY

[Graph showing scoring summary]

STATISTICS

RUSHING YARDS

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PASSING YARDS

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PASSING

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Senior linebacker Manti Te’o waits to congratulate his teammates following a Notre Dame touchdown. The preseason All-American recorded six tackles along with an interception and a fumble recovery, both were the first of his storied collegiate career.

Notre Dame kicked off the 2012 campaign in unfamiliar territory, but the trans-Atlantic trip had no effect on the Irish. Notre Dame scored touchdowns on its first three drives to start the game, taking a 27-3 lead into the half. Theo Riddick and George Atkinson combined for 206 yards and four rushing TDs as the Irish cruised to a 50-10 victory before returning stateside.

Notre Dame gathered during a timeout at a nearly sold-out Aviva Stadium in Dublin. The stadium holds 51,700 people and was constructed in 2010 on the famous site of Lansdowne Road for rugby and national team soccer.