It was a simple second-and-10 in the third quarter. Michigan State junior running back Le’Veon Bell took a handoff and cut to the right before Irish senior linebacker Manti Te’o brought him down in the backfield for a one-yard loss. Te’o rose and pointed to the sky. It was third-and-11.

Te’o rebounded from a week in which he lost both his grandmother and his girlfriend to record 12 tackles and lead the No. 20 Irish to a 20-3 win over No. 10 Michigan State.

“That was for them,” Te’o said.

“That was for my girl and my grandma and all my loved ones that have passed on. I know they’re all watching. It was a happy moment.”

The victory marks the first time since 2005 the Irish (3-0) toppled a top-10 opponent since 2005, snapping a nine-game losing streak in the category. Notre Dame is also 3-0 for the first time since 2002, when the Irish started 8-6.

In the win over the Spartans (2-1), Notre Dame beat a top-10 team on the road at night for the first time since 1983. The Irish beat Michigan State in back-to-back years for the first time in nearly two decades.

“It’s a big leap. It’s a signature win. There’s no question that when you go on the road against the No. 10-ranked team in the country and you beat them, it’s definitely going to build some confidence in that locker room,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said.

“They believe if they do the little things the right way … this win will help in that development.”

Notre Dame stifled Bell and the Michigan State running game, allowing just 50 rushing yards on 25 carries, Bell settled for 77 yards on 19 attempts.

“Obviously we felt like we can get him under control and force [Michigan State] to throw the football, we would much rather have that scenario than him grinding the football at us,” Kelly said.

“I think once they started to throw the football more, that was exactly where we’re hoping the game would kind of shift towards, and it did.”

When the Spartans did throw the ball, the Irish harassed junior quarterback Andrew Maxwell. Notre Dame sacked Maxwell four times as he finished the game 23-for-45 for 187 yards.

“We didn’t run the football, we didn’t protect the quarterback very well and we had some drops. We need to have more explosive plays on offense,” Spartans coach Mark Dantonio said.

Michigan State started 12 drives inside its own 30-yard line and did not enter the red zone, rolling up just 237 yards of total offense. The Spartans’ three points were the fewest they have scored at home since 1991, and the loss snapped their 15-game winning streak in the category. Notre Dame faced a second-quarter touchdown run in the second quarter of Notre Dame’s 20-3 win over the Spartans on Saturday.

Sophomore quarterback Everett Golson evaded the Michigan State defense while scoring on a six-yard touchdown run in the second quarter of Notre Dame's 20-3 win over the Spartans on Saturday.

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This Irish squad plays like more than a team

Ohana. It means family. This Notre Dame football team is a family. Brian Kelly said it. Cierre Wood said it. John Goodman said it. Prince Shembo said it. Louis Nix said it. Robby Toma said it. But Manti Te’o felt it.

The same man whose broad shoulders have carried this team for years was lifted Saturday by his teammates, his family. In Te’o, they found genuine inspiration. In his teammates, Te’o found unwavering support.

Just days after he lost both his grandmother and girlfriend, there was Te’o in East Lansing, Mich., doing the thing he knew best while showing the utmost mental fortitude — and leadership that goes far beyond the “C” on his jersey.

But it was his family on the field that made everything come together.

How else do the Irish not give up a touchdown to a team that had won its last 15 home games? How else do the Irish beat a top-10 team for the first time in its last 10 tries? How else do the Irish start 3-0 for the first time since 2002?

Families sacrifice, and that was the only way the Irish could win against a top-10 team.

Golston connects with Goodman on touchdown

Faced with a second-and-nine from the Spartan 36-yard line, Golston dropped back, avoided pressure before rolling to his right and chucking a diagonal pass to Goodman in the end zone. Goodman fought off a pass interference call to make the one-handed grab.

Overall GPA: 3.59

Notre Dame punctuated its first big win in the Kelly era with a suffocating defensive performance, notching its first 3-0 start since 2002. Depth in the secondary will be tested following Slaughter’s injury. Matthias Farley and Elijah Shumate filled in nicely and helped limit Michigan State to 5-for-17 on third downs.

Defensive Line

The depth of the Irish shined through Saturday, when three different players registered sacks — Sheldon Day, Stephon Tuitt and Tony Springmann. Notre Dame also held Le’Veon Bell to just 77 yards and only 13 in the second half.

Defensive Backs

The Irish secondary allowed just two pass plays of over 20 yards despite losing Janoris Slaughter to a season-ending injury. Matthias Farley and Elijah Shumate filled in nicely and helped limit Michigan State to 5-for-17 on third downs.

Special Teams

Kyle Brindza nailed both of his field goals and had forced four touchbacks on kickoffs. Ben Turk was instrumental in the field position battle as he pinned the Spartans inside the 20-yard four times.

Coaching

Bob Diaco had a masterful game plan on the defensive side of the ball, forcing eight Spartan punts. Chuck Martin, meanwhile, was able to call a balanced game.

Quartbacks

Everett Golson’s stats may not be the most impressive, but the sophomore signal-caller ran when he needed to, threw the ball away when he had to and had zero turnovers. He managed the game well in his first true road start.

Running Backs

Theo Riddick struggled much of the game but Cierre Wood had a good game in his return from suspension. His 26-yard run and fourth-down conversion in the fourth quarter were crucial in sealing the win.

Receivers

Robby Toma stepped up time after time for Notre Dame, providing a spark the Irish were missing early on. Tyler Eifert and Davaris Daniels were both held without a catch and the receivers couldn’t get free on third down. Notre Dame finished 1-for-14 on third downs.

Offensive Line

A week after Purdue pushed them around, the offensive line responded by controlling the line of scrimmage and opening up holes on the game-clinching drive. The unit also only allowed one sack after giving up five last week.

Linebackers

Although the Spartans were able to dint and dunk the Irish early in the second half, Manti Te’o and company dominated the rest of the game. Danny Spond also made four tackles in his first start. The linebackers were also key in keeping Michigan State out of the red zone.

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Notre Dame punctuated its first big win in the Kelly era with a suffocating defensive performance, notching its first 3-0 start since 2002. Depth in the secondary will be tested following Slaughter’s injury, but if the front seven can continue to put pressure on the quarterback, it will not matter as much.

Play of the Game

Golston connects with Goodman on touchdown

Faced with a second-and-nine from the Spartan 36-yard line, Golston dropped back, avoided pressure before rolling to his right and chucking a diagonal pass to Goodman in the end zone. Goodman fought off a pass interference call to make the one-handed grab.
Points allowed fewest since ’88

By MATTHEW DEFRANKS
Associate Sports Editor

The Notre Dame defense has allowed just 30 total points through its first three games, the fewest since the 1988 squad allowed 27 points to open the season. The 1988 team won Notre Dame’s last national championship.

“The most important thing is that our defense continues to be the group that we had committed to in building when we started this process, and they’re starting to get to that level that can play against anybody,” Irish coach Brian Kelly said.

Shembo, defense shut down Michigan State attack

By ANDREW GASTELUM
Associate Sports Editor

In last season’s 31-13 win over Michigan State, junior linebacker Prince Shembo was notably absent after leaving the team to attend to family matters.

But he made sure No. 10 Michigan State felt his presence this time around, recording nine tackles, two tackles for a loss, two quarterback hurries, one sack and a trademark sack dance in No. 20 Notre Dame’s 20-3 win.

“Every day we are just going to have to come out and prove,” he said. “We are not going to do anything different. It doesn’t mean anything. Just another win in the books. So now we just have to get prepared for the next game and do what we’ve been doing.”

[Defensively] the team’s identity is in the whole defense being there for each other and improving every day. So we just have to keep pumping each other up and we’ll be good.”

The Charlotte, N.C., native recorded a career-high in tackles — in just the first half alone with eight. Coming into the game Shembo had six tackles on the season, but the line- backer excelled in extended playing time, especially on third downs as the Irish forced each other up and we’ll be good.”

Meanwhile, Shembo attributed the defense’s standout performance to the team’s togetherness under a familiar’s

“Our team’s just pretty much pin your ears back and go,” Shembo said. “It was about stopping the run and forcing the pass.

“Just just what we could do to help the team. [Michigan State] just kept running at me.”

Shembo, along with senior linebacker Manti Te’o and his team-leading 12 tackles, shut down Michigan State’s Heisman candidate in junior running back Le’Veon Bell. Bell entered the game averaging 140 yards per game and two touchdowns, including a 210-yard, 44-carry performance in a 17-13 season-opening win over No. 24 Boise State.

“His weapon was No. 24 (Bell),” Te’o said. “If I can stop their weapon, they’re going to have to do something that they are not comfortable doing. And so (we knew) if we could stop what they like to do, that will be our best bet and our guys did a good job in forcing and coming to play.”

Shembo had a slightly more simplified reason for stopping Bell.

“It’s a big guy, I’m a bigger guy,” Shembo said.

In their last two meetings, the Irish defense has held the daunting Michigan State rushing attack to 79 total rushing yards. In the second half Saturday, the Spartans actually lost 24 rushing yards, mostly because they abandoned the running game while playing from behind.

“We had a gameplan going in. The whole thing was just everybody getting to the ball,” Te’o said. “Everybody having that tenacity and working together and doing their job. It was just about having that edge about them.”

Shembo wasn’t the only one fresh face lining up against the Spartans, as the Irish received major contributions from a young secondary and a flurry of freshmen.

“I think the young guys came out and did a lot of things,” junior defensive tackle Louis Nix said. “[Freshman safety] Elijah Shumate broke up two passes on third-and-long that could have been first downs. [Freshman defensive end] Sheldon Day came up with a big sack. [Sophomore defensive tackle] Tony Springmann came up with a big sack. I think the young guys came out and did a very good job for us.”

Meanwhile, Shembo attributed the defense’s standout performance to the unit’s togetherness under a familiar mantra.

“We talked about starting well and finishing well,” Shembo said. “The three F’s: faith, focus and finish.”

Contact Andrew Gastelum at agastel1@nd.edu

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Stats

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“The most important thing is that our defense continues to be the group that we had committed to in building when we started this process, and they’re starting to get to...
Senior linebacker Manti Te’o defends a pass intended for Spartans junior tight end Dion Sims. After a week of personal tragedy, Te’o led the Irish defense in stopping the Michigan State offense, recording 12 tackles and an interception. He will next lead the Notre Dame defense against Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson.

The Irish used their dominating defense and timely rushing attack to leave their first true road test with a 20-3 win over Michigan State. Notre Dame limited the Spartans to only 237 total yards and yielded just a 50-yard field goal. The Irish are 3-0 for the first time in 10 years and the win was the first over a top-10 opponent since 2005, when Notre Dame topped then-No. 5 Michigan.

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INSIDER

Senior running back Cierre Wood searches for running room. Wood had 56 rushing yards on 10 carries.

Senior running back Theo Riddick, left, is tackled by a crowd of Michigan State defenders.

Sophomore defensive end Stephon Tuitt engages with Spartans sophomore offensive tackle Skyler Burckard. Tuitt had a sack in the game, upping his season total to five.

Sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza winds up to kick off. Brindza recorded four touchbacks on kickoffs.

Senior receiver Robby Toma leaps to snare a pass from sophomore quarterback Everett Golson. The pair connected on five passes for 58 yards.

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