FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2012

IRISH INSIDER

IRISH CHOCOLATE

LOUIS NIX, NOTRE DAME’S SELF-PROCLAIMED ‘CHOCOLATE NEWS’ MAN, LEADS A REVIVAL ON DEFENSE

Photo Illustration by Suzanna Pratt and Brandon Keelcan
Offensive output must improve

The Irish fan base is smiling, and with good reason. Notre Dame will take the field Saturday night outlined against a blue-gray October sky in Chicago with a 4-0 record, a top-10 ranking and the third-best scoring defense in the nation. After disposing of longtime foe Denard Robinson — and with multiple teams on the Irish schedule suffering from injuries and early-season losses — Notre Dame fans are thinking ahead, calculating win totals in the double-digits and looking up plane tickets to BCS bowls.

The reality is simple, however: If the Irish offense cannot rev into gear and figure out a formula to put up points, this team may miss the BCS bowls.

There are no shortage of peripherals to describe what Bob Diaco and the Notre Dame defense have been this year, and there is little reason to expect that Stephon Tuitt, Manti Te’o and the rest of the unit will level off anytime soon. But a dominant defense can only take a team so far — the game is won by putting points on the scoreboard. The 13-6 victory was a blowout for the record books, but this game could have been very different.

If you need an example, look no further than Everett Golson, or Tommy Rees for that matter, can do that on a consistent basis, there is no reason to expect that those title runs, and also had a double-teams and defenses designed to stop him, and has recorded one catch in the past two games. Matched up against a spotty Miami secondary, the receivers finally have a chance to break out.

The emergence of DaVaris Daniels and TJ Jones could take pressure off Eifert, opening the All-American up down the field and vitally transforming the offense. Of course, another down week at the position will have everyone asking the same questions next week.

The quarterback position is yet another area where there have been more questions than answers. For weeks, Irish coach Brian Kelly has been emphatically declaring his support of Everett Golson as the Irish starter. However, if wins were assigned according to efficiency, then it would be clear who ‘the guy’ is looking at his size and the weakness on a crucial fumble, the game could have been very different.

The burden to take this Notre Dame team to the next level falls on the offense’s shoulders. Preseason predictions are largely a fool’s exercise, but the consensus of what was written about Notre Dame’s offense has proven to be true. The Irish are still struggling to replace Michael Floyd at wide receiver, and the lack of a marquee option at wideout has bottlenecked top tight end Tyler Eifert. Eifert has been battling through double-teams and defenses designed to stop him, and has recorded one catch in the past two games. Matched up against a spotty Miami secondary, the receivers finally have a chance to break out. The emergence of DaVaris Daniels and TJ Jones could take pressure off Eifert, opening the All-American up down the field and vitally transforming the offense. Of course, another down week at the position will have everyone asking the same questions next week.

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He’s a man who goes by many names: No. 9, Nasty Dawg, Big Lou. But to more than 4,000 Facebook friends, 179,000 YouTube viewers and 8,000 Twitter followers, junior nose guard Louis Nix is known by one name and one name only.

“Irish Chocolate ... it came from Facebook. I normally chat all my friends on Facebook, and someone once suggested I come up with a nice classic name,” Nix said. “A name of greatness, better than all the greats. Better than the Black Mamba, better than the Bus and the Fridge. I wanted it to be Irish Chocolate. My people came up with a nice name, and that’s what I settled with.”

After the long-winding journey of searching for a nickname, Nix said he finally came across something that fit him to the core.

“Since it’s a name, I need something that I am going to live up to. I’m a sweet guy, like I am covered with chocolate,” he said between laughs. “I am just like a Hershey’s bar. On the outside it looks delicious and really good. But on the inside there is just this splash of Wow! And it can hit you in the mouth if you’re not careful about it. Got it?”

Gaining a following

The 6-foot-3, 326-pound lineman is as jolly as they come, usually equipped with his trademark smile and never one to pass up a guaranteed-to-make-you-smile wisecrack. Nix is a social-media triple threat, maintaining a presence across Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. But when compared to the best of the best in the social world, Nix always carries his camaraderie with him.

“Chocolate News’ is his little thing,” Tuitt said. “Watching it, you know, is funny. He’s a funny guy and an emotional guy, not an ordinary type of guy, but he’s Louis Nix.”

Despite all the attention, Nix said his extracurricular activities don’t take away from football or school. Rather, they help the junior relax.

“It never is a distraction because it is just me,” Nix said. “All that stuff is just me. I just enjoy it. It will never get in the way of my books or my plays because that is really what helps me stay focused. I need that type of stuff to keep me in order.”

Trending

Coming out of Raines High School in Jacksonville, Nix played in the Under Armour All-American Game following his standout senior season in which he totaled 50 tackles and 10 sacks. As a four-star recruit, he originally committed to Miami, his favorite team as a child, before switching to Notre Dame and Irish coach Brian Kelly.

“Yeah, I sure can [remember my first impression of Nix]. It probably what your first impressions were,” Kelly said. “This big mammoth of a man who had a kid-like personality. He continues to have that. He’s just added a lot of maturity to that kid-like personality.”

Since coming into his first preseason camp overweight in 2010, Nix has learned to mix business with pleasure and became a comedic outlet for theA

Welcome to the Irish chocolate show, a perfect outlet for his engaging personality.

“I’m thinking sports broadcasting or something like that,” he said. “Maybe I could do ‘Louis’Off’ and kick Daniel Tosh out of there. Or I could be something like [Michael Strahan]. Or maybe kick Jack [Nolan] out and get Louis Nix in there.”

Graduate student captain and defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore said Nix’s attitude refreshes the entire team and keeps things upbeat at all times.

“He has just the love of the game. He has fun with it,” Lewis-Moore said. “Everybody knows Louis is a character. He keeps the game fun, he keeps you laughing and kind of looking things up.”

When asked about the one thing he wants the Notre Dame student body to know about him more than anything, the team’s emotional leader couldn’t come up with a clear answer. It takes him to fill up on his gamers-day-standard five bowls of Cinnamon Toast Crunch.

“I love my momma,” Nix said. “Tell them I love my momma.”

Welcome to the Irish Chocolate Show, where characters are always welcome.

Contact Andrew Gastelum at agastel1@nd.edu
HURRICANES PASSING

The Irish have seen junior quarterback Stephen Morris before. That time was on a cold winter’s day in El Paso, Texas on Dec. 31, 2010 and Morris was just a freshman then. Morris relived former starter Jacory Harris and his three interceptions and threw for 282 yards with two touchdowns and an interception in the Hurricanes 33-17 loss in the Sun Bowl.

Now, he’ll get a real shot at the Irish fresh off a record-setting performance. In last week’s 44-37 win over NC State, Morris set an ACC record with 566 passing yards and five touchdowns, including 271 passing yards in the first quarter alone. The junior already has 1,635 passing yards and nine touchdowns this season and average 21.77 yards per completion. Against NC State, Morris is the only receiver in the country with at least two games of at least 180 receiving yards and has 16 receptions for 477 yards in the last two games. Against NC State, the sophomore wideout set a career high with 191 receiving yards and two touchdowns on seven catches.

Only three schools average more interceptions per game than Notre Dame, which has already equaled its total from all of last year with eight.

Junior cornerback Bennett Jackson and senior linebacker Manti Te’o each have three, good enough for sixth-best in the nation. Freshman safety Elijah Shumate and sophomore safety Matthias Farley continue to impress as they gain more experience for the secondary. Dorsett is the only receiver in the nation with at least an average offensive game. If they can, the Irish will have a decisive upper hand.

The Irish have seen junior quarterback Everett Golson. If the running backs can get out to a fast start against a top-10 rating. Three straight games against Big Ten opponents saw the Irish defense shine, but that section of the schedule is over.

If the offensive unit does not figure out a formula to put points on the board, there’s no game in which the Irish are not at least somewhat vulnerable. This week, Miami’s speed and offensive quarterback coming into his own in Stephen Morris will put the Notre Dame secondary to the test. I don’t think Notre Dame can hold the Hurricanes to single digits.

HURRICANES OFFENSIVE COACHING

Defensive coordinator Bob Diaco has shown week after week that his defense will be prepared for anything. The defense hasn’t given up a touchdown in its last two games, both against top-25 teams with legitimate Heisman candidates.

HURRICANES SPECIAL TEAMS

Johnson leads the Miami return games, and already has a 95-yard kickoff return for a touchdown. But redshirt senior kicker Jake Wielczak has missed on both of his field-goal attempts of 40-plus yards and an interception in the Hurricanes 33-13 loss in the Sun Bowl.

Miami’s 2012 slate — Miami (4-1) was picked fifth in its six-team ACC division in the preseason — the Canes are 3-0 in conference play. Their only loss is a 52-13 drubbing at Kansas State in week two.

These aren’t your father’s Miami Hurricanes, but that hard-earned respect is evident in a cakewalk this weekend. Largely considered one of the weakest teams on Notre Dame’s 2012 slate — Miami (4-1) is picked fifth in six team ACC division in the preseason — the Canes are 3-0 in conference play. Their only loss is a 52-13 drubbing at Kansas State in week two.

Even with last year’s flat 31-17 home loss to USC, Brian Kelly is 12-2 as a head coach after a byweek. Whether that impressive mark improves will largely hinge on the right arm of Everett Golson. The combination of a byweek and facing Miami’s defense — the Canes have surrendered over 39 points per game against teams that aren’t Bethune-Cookman — might be just what the sophomore needs to ignite the offense.

HURRICANES SCHEDULE

Sept. 1 @ Boston College  W 41-32
Sept. 8 @ Kansas State  L 52-13
Sept. 15 Bethune-Cookman  W 38-10
Sept. 22 @ Georgia Tech  W 42-36 (OT)
Sept. 29 NC State  W 44-37
Oct. 6 Notre Dame
Oct. 13 North Carolina  L 31-27
Oct. 20 Florida State  L 31-23
Nov. 1 Virginia  L 34-20
Nov. 17 USF  L 24-16
Nov. 24 @ Duke

HURRICANES RUSHING

The Hurricanes boast a dual-threat rushing attack with senior running back Mike James and freshman running back and kick returner Duke Johnson. In the Sun Bowl, Notre Dame held James to only 14 yards rushing and receiving. So far this season, James has accumulated 278 yards and three touchdowns on 60 carries.
There are a few things that should worry the Irish this week. The biggest thing is the September momentum may be lost due to the bye-week. It is a completely new month with another set of tough teams, and Miami is no exception.

Miami boasts a strong passing attack that has been relentless in recent weeks led by Stephen Morris. If the Irish defense allows more than 500 yards in each conference game, it can be lost due to the bye week. It is a completely new month with 31.4 points per game allowed.

**EDGE: NOTRE DAME**

**IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING**

With the exception of Bethune-Cookman, the Miami defense has allowed at least 32 points in every game this season. But Kelly has yet to prove that his offense can consistently put drives together and put points on the board to put teams away.

**EDGE: EVEN**

**IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS**

Sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza made two more field goals against Michigan two weeks ago to put his season total at six. Freshman receiver Davonte Neal has yet to show his explosive ability on the punt return while Atkinson remains a big threat returning kickoffs for Notre Dame.

**EDGE: NOTRE DAME**

**IRISH SCHEDULE**

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<td>Wake Forest</td>
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**FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 34, Miami 13**

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**IRISH PASSING**

In the 13-6 win over No. 18 Michigan on Sept. 22, Notre Dame accumulated only 239 total yards despite getting six turnovers from its defense. Against the Wolverines, Irish coach Brian Kelly pulled sophomore quarterback Everett Golson after an ill-advised throw in the endzone that resulted in his second interception of the night.

Junior quarterback Tommy Rees managed the game efficiently, but struggled to put up points and put Michigan away early. Rees threw for 115 yards on 8-for-11 passing with no touchdowns, but no turnovers either.

In fact, the Irish only have three passing touchdowns this season, but average 13 yards per catch. Sophomore receiver DaVaris Daniels leads Notre Dame with 159 receiving yards on nine receptions. Senior tight end Tyler Eifert came into the year as one of the top receiving tight ends in the country, but only has one catch in his last two games, which came on a 38-yard reception from Rees on third-down to seal the victory over Michigan. Despite returning to running back before the season started, senior running back Theo Riddick leads the Irish with 14 receptions, mostly from out of the backfield.

Against NC State last week, junior quarterback Stephen Morris’ stellar performance overshadowed a very shaky Miami secondary that gave up 446 passing yards and four touchdowns to senior Wolfpack quarterback John Glennon. Freshman safety Deon Bush leads the Hurricanes secondary with 18 solo tackles.

**EDGE: EVEN**

**IRISH RUSHING**

The Notre Dame rushing attack is a team in the FBS to have never trailed at any point this season. Riddick leads the way with 242 yards and two touchdowns, and has emerged as a surprising between-the-tackles rushing threat in short-yardage situations. After a breakout performance (99 yards and two touchdowns on nine carries) in Notre Dame’s 50-10 victory over Navy in Dublin on Sept. 1, sophomore running back George Atkinson has seen limited action, especially since the return of senior running back Cierre Wood from a two-game suspension.

The Hurricanes defense has forced 12 turnovers this season, with seven of those being fumbles. Redshirt freshman linebacker Eddie Johnson leads the Hurricanes with three forced fumbles and 31 tackles. But the Miami defense gave up 287 rushing yards in a 42-36 overtime win over Georgia Tech on Sept. 22 and 224 rushing yards to NC State last week. The Hurricane defense has been prone to give up points this year as well, coming into the week ranked 100th in the country with 31.4 points per game allowed.

**FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 20, Miami 12**

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**NO. 9 NOTRE DAME**

**CB**

- KeiVarae Russell (Sr.)
- Danny Spond (Jr.)
- Prince Shembo (Sr.)
- Bennett Jackson (Jr.)
- Matthias Farley (Sr.)
- Michael Floyd (Sr.)
- Zeke Motta (Sr.)
- Dan Fox (Sr.)
- Manti Te’o (Sr.)
- Kyle Brindza (Sr.)
- Drue Tranquill (Jr.)
- Josh Atkinson (So.)
- Robby Toma (Sr.)
- Darragh O’Connell (Sr.)
- Jarrett Grace (So.)
- George Atkinson (Sr.)
- Zeke Motta (Sr.)
- Dan Fox (Sr.)
- Manti Te’o (Sr.)
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- Jarrett Grace (So.)
- George Atkinson (Sr.)
Miami freshman running back Duke Johnson breaks a tackle against Bethune-Cookman on Sept. 15. Johnson has 11 touchdowns this year.

By MATTHEW DeFRANKS
Associate Sports Editor

Miami running back Duke Johnson is fifth in the nation in all-purpose yards. He is second in the ACC in kickoff return average. He leads the Hurricanes in touchdowns. All this, and he’s just a freshman.

Johnson came out of Miami Norland Senior High School as the No. 1 running back in the country after gaining nearly 2,000 yards and scoring 29 touchdowns as a senior. He was also named Florida’s Mr. Football while his team claimed a state title for the first time in nearly a decade.

In his collegiate debut against Boston College, Johnson ran for 135 yards and two touchdowns on just seven carries. He became the first Miami freshman to top the century mark in rushing yards in his first game since Clinton Portis did it in 1999.

“Everybody’s got to get to the ball, especially with Duke,” Irish senior linebacker Manti Te’o said. “He’ll jump cuts and split defenders, so everyone has to get to the ball and everybody has to do their best and play within our scheme; realizing that Duke has the chance to break it at any time.”

The 5-foot-9, 188-pound freshman may not have the size of some other backs but makes up for it with his blazing speed. In high school, Johnson was clocked at 4.47 in the 40-yard dash.

“Oh, my gosh, he’s fast,” Irish graduate student defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore said. “He’ll jump cuts and split defenders, so everyone has to get to the ball and everybody has to do their best and play within our scheme; realizing that Duke has the chance to break it at any time.”

The Irish have dealt with other multidimensional players so far this season. “Last week’s kid was pretty multidimensional, [Michigan quarterback] Denard Robinson. He’s a pretty good football player too. So we’ve had those players that we’ve had to prepare for,” Kelly said. “He’s a very good football player, and a number of players that’s we’re going to see over the next eight weeks that have similar skill sets.”

“I will tell you, we know where he is [on kicks]. We’re going to have to be quite aware as to where he is, and make sure that we do a great job in our cover teams.”

Johnson pairs with senior running back Mike James to provide a couple of options in the Miami backfield. James has 278 yards and three touchdowns this season.

“It’s kind of like a lighting-lightning pretty much,” Lewis-Moore said. “They’re short guys but they’re not scared of taking it inside, between the tackles. We have to fundamentally sound across the board.”

The Irish are the only team in the Football Bowl Subdivision that has not allowed a rushing touchdown. Notre Dame also has not given up a play of more than 50 yards.

Contact Matthew DeFranks at mdefrank@nd.edu
Chicago-area players return to home city

By ANDREW OWENS
Assistant Managing Editor

On Oct. 28, 2001, Chicago Bears safety Mike Brown intercepted Jeff Garcia’s pass and scampered 33 yards into the end zone to notch a 37-31 overtime victory over the San Francisco 49ers. A young Chris Salvi was in the stands, taking in the thrill of his first NFL game.

After attending nearly 20 Bears games throughout his life, the Lake Forest, Ill., native will fulfill a lifelong dream Saturday when he runs out of the Soldier Field tunnel in this year’s Shamrock Series game. It’s been nearly 11 years since his first Soldier Field experience, but the memory still vividly plays through the senior safety’s mind.

“As a Bears fan, this is going to be great,” Salvi said. “I’ve been there to watch plenty of games; with the Bears playing in Soldier Field, it’s a great experience.”

Salvi is not the only Irish player who might feel out of place on the field instead of in the stands this weekend. Sophomore receiver DaVaris Daniels also lays claim to a unique connection to the historic field. His father, Phillip Daniels, starred as a Bears defensive end from 2000-2003 and recorded 23 sacks during his four seasons.

“I’m excited to be honest,” Daniels said. “Going back home, playing in front of my whole high school is probably going to be there, so it’s definitely exciting.

“We’re playing on a field my dad used to play on also. That’s a crazy feeling. I can’t wait.”

Despite the excitement of playing in the stadium in which he grew up cheering his heroes, Daniels doesn’t expect to feel any differently at kickoff than he would in any other game.

“It will definitely be special, but I think I’ll be able to handle it pretty well,” he said.

With 10 current players hailing from Illinois, this weekend will be a homecoming of sorts for a portion of the Irish roster. But the players said they will only leave Soldier Field with a sweet taste in their mouths if they can avoid a bitter defeat.

“I want it to be a win,” said senior guard Chris Watt when asked what he wants his memory of the game to be. Watt, a Glen Ellyn, Ill., resident, first attended a Bears game with his father and brother in 1998, but never reached the Catholic League Championship, annually held at Soldier Field.

 “[The Chicago-area players] are all really excited, too. DaVaris’ dad played there for a number of seasons and [junior quarterback Tommy Rees’] dad worked in the organization,” Watt said. “It’s kind of home for both of them. So they’re looking forward to getting back there. I’ve got coaches coming, lots of friends from the area and my parents and brother as well.”

Watt said the allure of playing in high-profile games helped attract him to Notre Dame when he was weighing his options in high school.

“It’s awesome,” he said. “Coming here as a recruit, seeing that I was playing in Dublin and at Soldier Field my senior year was nice. It’s been something I’ve been looking forward to since I came here.”

Contact Andrew Owens at aowens2@nd.edu
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