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Photo illustration by Suzanna Pratt and Brandon Keelean

IRISH INSIDER

DAN FOX LETS IT LOOSE ON FORMIDABLE IRISH DEFENSE

‘FOXY’
Irish need style points to climb

Matthew DeFranks
Associate Sports Editor

Style matters — and not just in a Shamrock Series sort of way.

Following the release of the initial Bowl Championship Series (BCS) rankings Sunday evening, what was once a pipe dream can realistically be thought about: a national championship berth. In order to get there, however, No. 5 Notre Dame will need to jump three teams, two of which can finish blemish-free.

The Big Ten’s demise this year has negatively impacted Notre Dame’s strength of schedule. A “signature” road win over then-No. 10 Michigan State has been degraded to a September victory over a mediocre, one-dimensional 4-3 squad. A charged night game win over then-No. 10 Oregon State — Notre Dame is now just a notch above the Irish on the ballot.

The rest of the way, the Irish will face just two ranked teams, although both are road contests against top-10 foes.

With the now diminished schedule, Notre Dame will not be able to hop over an undefeated SEC champion, an unblemished Kansas State team or an 13-0 Oregon squad — who would have toppled Stanford, USC or Oregon State.

That’s where style points come in.

The BCS computers will tell you that margin of victory does not matter but the pollsters will tell you otherwise. It definitely matters if a team eked out a 2-point win in triple overtime or if a squad wins in a 50-point blowout.

Likewise, if there is a loss, the way you lose is important — whether it’s a goal line stand or a six-touchdown drubbing. If Notre Dame’s ultimate goal is to make the national title game in Miami (and it should be now), they need to rack up style points like a GQ model. As it currently stands, the Irish are almost assured of a BCS bowl appearance if they finish 4-2 in the last half of the season.

Problem is that the Irish and coach Brian Kelly ignore the rankings. “I really don’t care,” Kelly said. “I’m sorry, I know all of our fans care a lot about that stuff and that’s great.”

Style points and running up the score are very distinct, though, and have vastly different intentions. In 48-point wins over Navy and Miami, the Irish did not run up the score, despite what the final score indicated. They repeatedly ran the ball, piling up yards and points on their way to dominating victories over inferior opponents. They did not throw the ball around the yard up three scores in the final quarter.

So in games against lesser opponents like BYU, Pittsburgh, Boston College and Wake Forest, the Irish need to put on a similar showing.

None of those four teams are as good as the Irish. Heck, they may even struggle to compete with Notre Dame. So Notre Dame’s goals should not just be to win against those teams, it should be to win big.

Could Notre Dame struggle to put up points against some of those teams? Sure, especially with an inconsistent offense led by two quarterbacks and three running backs. Could one of those teams upset the Irish? Of course, this is college football.

Could the Irish run the table and still be left out of the title game? Maybe, but a little bit of style will go a long way for Notre Dame.

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Check out all of our football coverage online at ndsmcobserver.com

Four-star linebacker set to visit as commitment wavers

By Chris Allen
Sports Editor

The Irish will spend the upcoming weekend hoping to solidify the commitment of one of their top 2013 commitments. Linebacker Alex Anzalone visited Florida for its win over LSU on Oct. 6, a game that ESPN analysts have reported that he may be wavering in his commitment to Notre Dame. Anzalone, a 6-foot-3 linebacker from Wyomissing, Pa., is the third-best prospect in the 2013 Notre Dame recruiting class, according to ESPN. Irish recruiting expert said that with Anzalone on campus for the BYU game, the Notre Dame recruiting staff will hope to keep the linebacker committed.

“I don’t think it’s a situation where [Anzalone] is just going down to Florida for the fun of it,” said Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliated Irish Sports Daily. “I think he has an interest in Florida and has for a long time. Where the disconnect is with Notre Dame, there’s been a lot of speculation, and Alex hasn’t said one word or the other what the issue is.

“I’m not sure what more Notre Dame can show him, at this point. But both sides will certainly hope to meet this weekend, and talk about any sort of doubt he’s having. Hopefully they can clear it up.

Frank said Anzalone has a good idea of where he would fit in at Notre Dame based on the Irish recruiting pitch.

“He knows everything about the program, and his playing time, knows where he fits at his position,” Frank said. “He gets the academic value here, and he knows the social side of things. So I’m just not sure what the real issue is, or why it would be an issue. I don’t think we’ll know for sure what he’s going to do after he meets with the coaches this weekend.”

The home contest against BYU comes on the heels of a Stanford weekend that went very positively for the Irish recruiting staff. Notre Dame hosted two USC commitments in safety Max Redfield and cornerback Chris Hawks, and Frank said both players — Redfield and Hawks are ranked in the top half of the ESPN150 — came away impressed with the game atmosphere in South Bend.

“I think [Redfield] — and Chris Hawkins — just felt like they really hit it well here,” Frank said. “They got along well with the players, and they got along well with the coaching staff. I think [Redfield] really loved the support fan. Here was a game where it was raining for four hours and the fans were on their feet going crazy when it was miserable outside. A lot of Irish fans don’t realize how important that is to a recruit.”

The lone listed 2013 uncommitted recruit on campus to see the BYU game is running back Tarean Folston from Cocoa, Fla. Frank said Folston, who is listed as an athlete by ESPN, would team with 2013 commit Jamel James and current Irish back Amir Carlisle to create a well-rounded future running back corps.

“It is clearly obvious that they love Tarean Folston,” Frank said. “He plays at a very high level in the state of Florida, and he just dominates. Jamel James is more of an Earl Campbell-type back, just a physical runner, but Folston is a guy who can hit the home run and make the big play. It’s a threat on every play.

“There’s just no way you can pass up on Tarean Folston. He’s too good of a player. Notre Dame wants him in the fold.”

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

Email Mike at mikefrank18@sbcglobal.net and tell him The Observer sent you.

Go Irish! Beat BYU!
Going with the flow

Long-locked linebacker Dan Fox provides Notre Dame defense with consistency

By ANDREW GASTELUM
Associate Sports Editor

According to legend, the biblical character Samson was blessed with phenomenal strength, yet there was one condition to his clout: He could never cut his hair.

Since his last haircut, senior linebacker Dan Fox has added over 20 pounds of muscle. Coincidence? Fox thinks not.

“No, no, no, it’s not true, it’s just a cool story,” said Fox, who often draws comparisons to Samson from others. “People say all the time, ‘You can’t cut it or you will lose all of your strength.’ But I don’t believe that. It’s funny though.”

Instead, the 6-foot-3, 240-pound linebacker named “Foxy” finds a better comparison for his hair rooted in the locks of an NFL icon.

“I get a lot of [Packers linebacker Clay Matthews] comparisons,” Fox said. “He’s a really good player so it’s great to be compared to him. But hopefully I can try to be as good as he is.”

Despite the uncanny similarities he shares with Samson, Fox said he holds one definite advantage over the heroic character.

“I use shampoo and conditioner all the time,” Fox said. “But I just got this Garnier Fructis oil stuff. It’s kind of like Moroccan oil and you put it in your hair to make it soft. It’s pretty sweet.”

Growing it out

When he attended an all-boys Catholic high school at St. Ignatius in Cleveland, Fox met hair length requirements set by the school’s administration. But once graduation came, Fox was free to create his own image.

“I’ve been growing my hair since the end of high school,” said Fox, who had this deed of discipline, Mr. Arthur, who made me cut it before graduation (in 2009) and I haven’t gotten a haircut since.

“At first it was just that I never got it cut. I was that kid in college that never had a haircut. And then after it just started to fall back I just let it go. Now it’s just like I’m never going to get a haircut.”

Fox’s consistency plays a major role in in the nation’s top red-zone defense — Irish opponents are scoring touchdowns at a measly 12.5 percent rate in the red zone — and second in scoring defense as the Irish only give up 18.7 points per game.

“When you look at Dan Fox play, and he doesn’t hesitate,” Te’o said. “It’s kind of like a Samson-esque goal line stand from the sidelines.

“I was nervous, but then again I have full confidence in everyone on that defense,” Fox said. “I just knew we were going to win. Once it went to overtime I knew we were winning that game.”

“We just know we have each other’s backs when it comes down to it. If you make a mistake, someone is going to get in your face about it. That’s the thing; you’re held accountable. That’s how you’re going to get better. You have your weaknesses and you have to get better at them. It’s about letting things go and knowing that we are going to get better and be one of the best defenses in the country.”

When asked about his golden-brown locks, the player who comes across more as a surfer than a linebacker was breezy instead of flippant.

“I don’t think the power’s in the hair,” Fox said. “I guess it’s just attached to the power. That’s pretty funny though.”

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"You see Dan Fox play, and he doesn't hesitate.”
Manti Te’o senior linebacker

"Well, I think, first of all, he’s a very physical player,” Kelly said. “Though I would not say that he wasn’t physical last year. I think just overall knowledge of the position. As you know, the (weakside) linebacker position for him was something new. I thought he adapted very well last year. There were times that we thought that he was clearly the No. 1 player at that position.”

Making interior progress

Oftentimes, the linebacker’s persona on the field doesn’t get too far past being the “guy with the hair.” Fox is off to a career year in 2012, having already recorded 31 tackles in six games, yet is often overshadowed by the Heisman contender he lines up next to. But Fox said he owes senior linebacker Manti Te’o the bulk of the credit for his success at his new position.

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COUGARS PASSING
BYU brings an experienced senior quarterback in Riley Nelson to South Bend against a young Irish secondary. Nelson has thrown for 1,059 yards and six touchdowns this season. But the BYU signal-caller, who transferred in from Utah State, has also thrown eight interceptions. Nelson set a career high from Utah State, has also thrown eight interceptions. Nelson set a career high with 155 rushing yards against Hawaii on Sept. 28 in a 47-0 blowout win. Nelson has also shown the ability to run the ball, with 113 rushing yards on the season.

The Notre Dame defense still remain the only one in college football to have not yet given up a rushing touchdown this season. Te’o leads the team with 59 tackles and the defense has forced 15 turnovers this season.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

COUGARS RUSHING
Freshman running back Jamaal Williams leads the Cougars with 345 rushing yards and five rushing touchdowns this season. The freshman back averages 5.3 yards per carry while BYU as a whole averages 4.2 yards per carry, mostly behind a veteran right side of the offensive line. Williams set a career high with 155 rushing yards against Hawaii on Sept. 28 in a 47-0 blowout win. Nelson has also shown the ability to run the ball, with 113 rushing yards on the season.

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EDGE: NOTRE DAME

COUGARS OFFENSIVE COACHING
Defensive coordinator Bob Diaco has relayed the importance of not falling into a trap game mentality against the Cougars, and his defense is coming off another difficult defense. With the up-and-down play from the BYU offense that has struggled to low totals on a couple of occasions. This unit that has been on a four-week tear has been solid enough for fourth best in the nation. Senior linebacker Manti Te’o also has three interceptions, including two against senior Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson. In last week’s 20-13 overtime win over No. 17 Stanford, the Irish defense held senior quarterback Josh Nunes to only 125 yards passing.

The Irish defense has danced around it all year. Against Michigan, six. Against Miami, three again. Against Michigan State it allowed three points. Against Georgia Tech 24-21. Against San Jose State 24-21. Against New Mexico State 24-21. The Irish defense still remain the only one in college football to have not yet given up a rushing touchdown this season. Te’o leads the team with 59 tackles and the defense has forced 15 turnovers this season.

EDGE: EVEN

COUGARS SPECIAL TEAMS
The Cougars average a solid 24.1 yards per kick return along with 11.3 yards per punt return. Junior kicker Junior cornerback Bennett Jackson leads the Irish with 33 career plays of 20 yards or more. This is the week they finally do it, against a BYU offense that has struggled to low totals on a couple of occasions. The Irish defense has danced around it all year. Against Michigan, six. Against Miami, three again. Against Michigan State it allowed three points. Against Georgia Tech 24-21. Against San Jose State 24-21. Against New Mexico State 24-21. The Irish defense still remain the only one in college football to have not yet given up a rushing touchdown this season. Te’o leads the team with 59 tackles and the defense has forced 15 turnovers this season.

EDGE: EVEN

COUGARS SCHEDULE
Aug. 30 Utah State W 6-3
Sept. 7 Boise State L 7-6
Sept. 14 @ Washington State W 30-6
Sept. 21 @ Weber State W 45-13
Sept. 28 @ Boise State W 54-21
Oct. 5 Hawaii W 47-0
Oct. 12 Utah State W 6-3
Oct. 19 @ Notre Dame W 22-10
Oct. 26 @ Georgia Tech W 54-24
Nov. 2 Idaho W 22-17
Nov. 9 @ San Jose State W 37-7
Nov. 16 @ New Mexico State W 34-24

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 35, BYU 3

In 2005, the last time BYU traveled to Notre Dame, the Irish won 49-23 behind six touchdown passes from Brady Quinn, four of which went to receiver Maurice Stovall. While Saturday’s final result will be the same, the method of victory will be quite different for the Irish.

Notre Dame’s offense will struggle to muster points against another difficult defense. With the up-and-down play from the quarterback position, asserting the run game will again be important for Brian Kelly’s squad. With three options in the backfield, the Irish running backs should be fresh in the second half when the stout Cougar defense is slowing down. A fourth-quarter score will put the game away in what will be the fifth consecutive contest in which the defense holds the opponent out of the end zone.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 20, BYU 6

Before leaving the game due to a concussion, sophomore quarterback Everett Golson threw for 141 yards and a touchdown in Notre Dame’s 20-13 overtime win over Stanford on Saturday. Golson looked more comfortable scrambling out of the pocket for yards or time rather than throwing the ball into tight coverage. Junior quarterback Tommy Rees came in after Golson’s injury and threw for 43 yards and a touchdown. Rees led the game-tying drive in the fourth quarter and eventual game-winning drive capped off by a seven-yard touchdown pass to TJ Jones. Senior tight end Tyler Eifert caught a touchdown pass as well and led the Irish with 57 receiving yards against the Cardinal. Eifert also leads the Irish with 246 receiving yards this season. Ten of Eifert’s 15 receptions have resulted in a first down or touchdown. Notre Dame averages 206.5 passing yards per game, which puts the team at 86th in the nation.

BYU’s defense comes into the weekend ranked as the seventh best scoring defense in the nation, giving up 13.6 points per game. Last week, Oregon State junior quarterback Cody Vaz picked apart the BYU secondary for 332 passing yards and three touchdowns in a 42-24 loss. Junior linebacker Kyle Van Noy recorded another sack last week, to go with his total of 7.5 sacks and 11.5 tackles for a loss. Against the Beavers, the BYU defensive line batted down three passes. The BYU defense is also third in the nation in 3rd down conversions, giving up a first down only 25.74 percent of the time on third downs.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

IRISH PASSING

Notre Dame’s rushing attack found its way in the second half against Stanford. Senior running backs Cierre Wood and Theo Riddick led the way once again with 66 and 45 rushing yards, respectively. The Irish average 181.2 rushing yards per game. Sophomore running back George Atkinson finishes out the Irish rushing attack and averages 9.1 yards per carry to go along with his three touchdowns on the season. Golson’s fumbling problems still continue to limit the offensive potential of Brian Kelly’s squad.

The Cougars enter the game with the third best rushing defense in the nation, giving up only 67.9 rushing yards per game. The Cougars also limit opposing offenses to only 15.4 first downs per game, 10th best in the nation. Senior inside linebacker Brandon Ogletree leads the Cougars in tackles with 57, six of those for a loss. Until the Beavers first touchdown, the Cougars defense had held opposing teams with- out an offensive touchdown for 13 straight quarters.

EDGE: BYU

IRISH OFFENSIVE COACHING

The Irish are still struggling to find their offensive rhythm and take advantage of good field position and scoring opportunities. Meanwhile, BYU boasts one of the nation’s top defenses statistically despite giving up 42 points to Oregon State last week. The Cougars still rank fifth in the nation in total defense, giving up 266.9 yards per game.

EDGE: EVEN

IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS

Sophomore kicker Kyle Brindza made a clutch field goal to send the game to overtime last week, but the Irish also botched a snap on a short field goal. Notre Dame ranks 101st in the nation in punt returns (3.7 yards per return) and 90th in kickoff returns (19.38 yards per return).

EDGE: BYU

IRISH SCHEDULE

| Sept. 1 | vs. Navy | W 50-10 |
| Sept. 8 | vs. Purdue | W 20-17 |
| Sept. 15 | @ Michigan St. | W 20-3 |
| Sept. 22 | Michigan | W 13-6 |
| Oct. 6 | vs. Miami | W 41-3 |
| Oct. 13 | Stanford | W 20-13 (OT) |
| Oct. 20 | BYU | |
| Oct. 27 | @ Oklahoma | |
| Nov. 3 | Pittsburgh | |
| Nov. 10 | @ Boston College | |
| Nov. 17 | Wake Forest | |
| Nov. 24 | USC | |

If you are tired of hearing that this game is a “trap game,” join the club. A trap game creeps on an unfocused team, jumps out from the bushes and ambushes them, ruining their season at the same time. This Irish team is not that team.

And that is precisely why this team is different from any of the ones in the past 10 years. They have fought to win the close games while blowing out their lesser opponents. They have refused to play down to their competition and have a 6-0 record and a top-five ranking to show for it.

So if you want to see a talk about how tough the Cougars’ front seven is, go ahead. If you want to talk about Everett Golson’s concussion, go ahead. Just don’t tell me this game is a trap game as the team looks forward to Oklahoma.
Stiff BYU defense to test Irish offense

By ALLAN JOSEPH
Editor-in-Chief

At every media session this week, two words have come up over and over again: “trap game.” Sandwiched between an emotional overtime win over Stanford and a trip to Norman, Okla., for a night game against the No. 9 Sooners, the contest against BYU seems tailored to trip up the No. 5 Irish. The Cougars (4-3) come in with a low profile, and more importantly, with a suffocating defense that has every intention of stopping Notre Dame’s inconsistent offense.

“It’s a big opportunity for us,” Cougars cornerback Preston Hadley told the BYU media this week. “We can really come out and make a statement.”

If Irish coach Brian Kelly has had one mission this week, however, it’s to make sure his players focus on the task at hand. Kelly and his staff have drilled one message into their players.

“It’s a trap game each week if you think that you can take a breather,” Kelly said. “But if you just stay on the course [and] continue to do what you’re doing, we’ll be fine.”

The Cougars boast a defense ranked No. 5 in the country in total defense, allowing their opponents just 281 yards per game. The BYU defense also ranks No. 3 in the country in rushing defense (68 yards/game), third-down conversion rate (26 percent) and red zone conversion rate (53 percent).

“It’s another physical football team that plays great defense,” Kelly said. “They have won a couple of close games this year on the backs of their defense.”

Outside linebacker Kyle Van Noy leads the Cougars on defense. Named to a midseason All-America second team and tied for the fourth-most sacks in the nation this year, Van Noy is BYU’s defensive playmaker. When asked, Kelly said Van Noy reminded him in some ways of senior Irish linebacker Manti Te’o, though the two play different positions in similar 3-4 schemes.

“I think the way they ask him to play, he gets the opportunity to get after the quarterback much more than Manti,” Kelly said. “But you know, he’s a guy that is relentless like Manti. Look, the great players have the same traits. It’s just they are played at different positions, but they certainly could be interchangeable.”

Senior BYU linebacker and captain Brandon Ogletree also plays a key role in the Cougars’ defense. Playing a similar middle linebacker position to Te’o, Ogletree leads BYU in tackling just like his Irish counterpart.

“They put [Ogletree] in a position where he can play downhill [and] physical,” Kelly said.

With all of the talk from coaches about avoiding the prototypical trap game, Te’o said the Irish have taken the message to heart.

“Our team has done a great job of just focusing on the next opponent,” he said. “We don’t have Oklahoma this week. We don’t have Stanford. We already played Stanford. Right now it’s BYU, and that’s all we’re focused on. Until Sunday comes, you know, we’ll stop focusing on BYU. Until then, it’s all BYU.”

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BYU sophomore defensive back Craig Bills forces a fumble in the Cougars’ 6-3 win over Utah St. on Oct. 5 at LaVell Edwards Stadium in Provo, Utah.
Lewis-Moore brings positive energy to defense

KENZIE SAIN | The Observer

Irish graduate student defensive end Kapron Lewis-Moore, center, goes up against the Miami offensive line in Notre Dame’s 41-3 win over the Hurricanes on Oct. 6 at Soldier Field in Chicago.

By ANDREW OWENS
Assistant managing editor

Kapron Lewis-Moore represents the old guard of Notre Dame’s youthful defensive line. When he committed to the Irish in January 2008, Irish coach Brian Kelly had just wrapped up his inaugural season—at Cincinnati.

But don’t confuse Lewis-Moore’s age with a lack of energy. In fact, it’s the fifth-year captain who in many ways is the boisterous leader of a resurgent Irish defense.

“When he feels that there is not as much energy, he’s the guy that steps out in front and really gets guys going,” senior linebacker Manti Te’o said. “When we’re in a huddle or something, he gets guys going like that. When he makes a play, you always will see [No.] 89 in there congratulating his teammate. He energizes the group in so many ways.”

To Lewis-Moore, having an animated defense can be just as critical to the unit’s success as proper tackling technique or possessing a knack for forcing turnovers.

“Yes, you have to maintain it,” he said. “You have to maintain it as much as possible and I feel like positive energy is really infectious. If somebody gets a good play, it sort of just goes all over. If you get a big play on an interception or a big tackle I just feel like that elevates everybody.”

As Notre Dame students can attest, Lewis-Moore’s vibrant personality extends beyond Notre Dame Stadium. At men’s basketball games, he typically stands underneath the basket in the front row of the student section wearing a floppy hat while screaming at the top of his lungs for an Irish victory.

“I like to be fun but I know with this team there is a time to play and a time to be serious,” said Lewis-Moore of his personality. “Usually when it is time to be serious everybody knows that it is time to get serious. Luckily I don’t have to get out there and try to put on a hard front or something like that. I just try to keep the energy up and try to be positive as much as I can and try to have my attitude as positive as possible.”

Kelly said Lewis-Moore has developed as much as any player in the program during the past three years.

“Yeah, a lot of growth, a lot of growth as a leader in our football program,” Kelly said. “Yeah, certainly the dynamics there which put him front and center now in that defensive line meeting room, he has taken that over.

“It is the guy that is respected in that room. There is clearly, from my end, a commitment from him to being a better football player — not that he didn’t want to be last year.”

Like any influential leader, Lewis-Moore realizes the importance of preparing the next crop of talent to replace him, duties that include rooming with freshman defensive end Sheldon Day for road games and organizing captain-led film sessions.

“I just kind of want to be a battery for the [defensive line], a battery for the team,” Lewis-Moore said. “Just trying to help out as much as I can. If they have something that they need or something they need to ask, I try to help them out as much as I can. I almost want to be like a mentor but I try to be there. I try to embrace that role.”

Although his personality and approach differ from that of the other captains, Lewis-Moore’s role in the team’s 6-0 start and No. 5 Bowl Championship Series ranking cannot be overstated.

“It’s flashy, so he brings that kind of energy, and then he’s serious at the same time,” Te’o said. “He’s that guy that makes that group run. So Kap, there is the reason why he’s the captain on our team.”

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