Talk can be quieted with Week One win

By Mike Monaco
Senior Sports Writer

Irish enter regular season with 17 commitments

Rebecca Lorton
Assistant Managing Editor

Much has been said about the Irish offense this season. Now is the time to let their play speak.

The chatter has been recent, as four Irish players—three project-ed to start and one as a backup—are out with injuries or practices and games while the University investigates suspected academic dishonesty. Senior receiver Stephon Davis, senior defensive lineman Issaq Williams, junior cornerb ack KeiVarae Russell and graduate student linebacker Kendall Moore are the four who will miss Saturday’s game as part of the ongoing academic investigation.

The Irish had to replace the former three immediately. Russell was a spectacular shutdown corner and almost a shoe-in captain. Williams was a first-teamer on the line and would have been formidable alongside junior Sheldon Day. Daniels was Notre Dame’s first pass-catcher with the most receptions and receiving yards on the team.

Their absences have had far-reaching implications on both sides of the ball, as they’ve had to be replaced with young, inexperienced players. The defense especially has felt the loss repeatedly and often. Rice has a “creative” offense, as Irish head coach Brian Kelly said, and it won’t be easy for a realigned defense to respond on the fly in early games.

Under head coach Brian Kelly, Notre Dame has emphasized a “man in” mentality. Sophomore defensive lineman Isaac Rochell had to step up for Williams, with a combination of playmaking and leadership. The senior defensive student cornerback Cody Figgs, sophomore cornerback Cole Luke, sophomore safety Max Redfield and senior defensive back Matthias Farley, all contributing to fill in for Russell. Now only their play will show how their practice has paid off if they are ready to tackle their new roles.

Much has been said of senior quarterback Everett Golson’s return to the spring and how he has progressed as a player and a leader. There is a lot on Golson’s shoulders. After the nearly-unprecedented season in 2012, some are expecting him to repeat that success. However, Golson has not been in a game since the national championship game in January, according to 247sports. “Getting him out of LSU country … that’s big time,” Loy said. “He’s one of the best tackles in the country. He’s got to mold his body a little bit better. He’s got kind of a softness to his body right now. So when he gets in the weight room and starts working with [director of football strength and conditioning] Coach [Paul] Longo and then getting with [offensive line] Coach [Harry] Hirshfield, the sky is the limit for that kid.”

Center Tristen Hoge joined Tillery by the end of the 2013 calendar year. The 6-foot-5, 250-pound Hoge, whom Loy referred to as a “brick,” ranks as the top center in the nation and the No. 92 player overall, per 247Sports.

“When Notre Dame takes the field Saturday for its season opener against Rice, the program will already be off and running in the recruiting world.”

The Irish have already landed 17 commitments in the class of 2015, with all pledging to Notre Dame by July 2. There’s still room to add more bodies, as Irish recruiting analyst Tom Loy said he expects the class to finish with 23 members.

As for the current 17 player contingent, Loy pointed to the offensive line and the receivers as the strengths of Notre Dame’s class of 2015.

“Have we done what they’ve done across the offensive line,” said Loy, who covers Notre Dame recruiting for Blue and Gold Illustrated, part of the 247Sports network.

Offensive lineman Jerry Tillery, who hails from Shreveport, La., became Notre Dame’s first member in the class of 2015 when he committed to the Irish on June 22, 2013. The 6-foot-6, 315-pounder is the No. 12 offensive tackle in the nation, according to 247Sports.

“Getting him out of LSU country … that’s big time,” Loy said. “You can’t just stop recruiting these guys that are not committed,” Loy said. “You’ve got to keep those guys happy. Just because they’re committed, obviously you know they’re not signed.”

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Irish have to overcome opponents in away games at Florida State, USC and Arizona State, and home games against Stanford and Michigan.

The senior class is the smallest Notre Dame has had since coach Brian Kelly has coached in his tenure here. A large contingent of juniors and sophomores makes up the bulk of the Irish roster.

The captains were just named Tuesday night and are from three different classes. Graduate student Austin Collinsworth, seniors Cam McDaniel and Nick Martin and junior Sheldon Day will be leading the Irish. With the decision to appoint captains taking so long, is there a strong enough group of leaders or senior presence to stabilize the inexperienced nature of a young team?

“Much has been said about the game than all of Notre Dame’s young team taking on one of the toughest schedules in the country. Will the inexperienced players have it in them to overcome opponents in away games at Florida State, USC and Arizona State, and home games against Stanford and Michigan?”

Senior cornerback KeiVarae Russell was one of the toughest schedules in the country. Will the inexperienced players have it in them to overcome opponents in away games at Florida State, USC and Arizona State, and home games against Stanford and Michigan?

The senior class is the smallest Notre Dame has had since coach Brian Kelly has coached in his tenure here. A large contingent of juniors and sophomores makes up the bulk of the Irish roster.

The seniors are those of the author and may not necessarily those of The Observer.

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By MARY GREEN
Sports Editor

“Am I having too much fun?”

Everett Golson can’t help but laugh as photo after photo is snapped of him. Strapping up his helmet, tugging on the faceguard, staring into the lens like he’s focusing on a receiver on 3rd-and-long — and then Golson even wants a few pictures for himself, smiling the whole time.

It’s clear a career in modeling — at least one that requires keeping a straight face — might not be in the cards for the senior quarterback.

The cards for the senior quarterback.

In 2012, Everett Golson was the starting quarterback for Notre Dame. Golson was the starting quarterback on the depth chart. But he had that privilege taken away in a game against Miami on Oct. 6, 2012, for being late to practice.

“He wasn’t doing the things leaders do,” Kelly said at the team’s media day Aug. 19. In Golson’s defense, the 2012 squad wasn’t lacking leadership, with leaders that included Heisman Trophy runner-up Manti Te’o and two-time captain Zack Martin.

“I think 2012 was a little different,” Golson said. “I was a redshirt freshman. We had Manti; we had Zack; we had guys that were in that leadership role.”

This year, the quarterback said he saw a hole and decided to fill it.

“For the simple fact that we don’t have as many guys — all those seniors that are now gone,” he said Aug. 19. “I took up now, and I’m the senior, so I have to be the leader of this team.”

Kelly said Golson emerged as a leader for other reasons.

“He said it, he didn’t want the suspension to define who he was,” Kelly said. “He wanted this opportunity to show that he was much more than that, and I think he’s going to get that opportunity.”

Irish junior defensive lineman Sheldon Day, one of Golson’s best friends on the team, said he has seen Golson take a more proactive approach to his game.

“His ability to study film and to see where he made his mistakes to make sure he doesn’t make them again,” Day said of what makes Golson so hard to stop. “He’s always asking us, ‘What did you do here, what did you do there?’ to make sure he doesn’t make them again.”

It’s a big step from Golson’s game in 2012, when he tended to rely on his mobility rather than a thorough knowledge of the playbook to pick up first downs.

Day said that dedication is now part of Golson’s demeanor, both on the field, where he’s most visible, and in the classroom, where his original mistake occurred.

“He’s committed to everything,” Day said. “He’s always putting his heart into everything he does now, so if it’s school, he’s focused on school; if it’s football, he’s putting his all into football.”

With his tardiness and irresponsibility in the past, Golson said he now sees the value of the game he loves.

“I think it means a lot to him to have time to see different things, being away from the field, where he’s most visible,” Golson’s first practice back from his suspension. “I think there must have been some real good teaching there that has allowed him that opportunity to come in here and have a better sense of everything.”

That teaching came at the hands of George Whitfield Jr., the “quarterback guru” who made sure Golson stayed sharp in his absence.

Whitfield has worked with some of the NFL’s finest quarter- backs, such as Ben Roethlisberger and Andrew Luck, and with, at GE, has fine-tune his skills out in California.

That’s allowed him to take on a more complex offense this season, which will utilize his speed and that of his receivers.

“It’s tremendously fast,” Golson said. “Two years ago, we didn’t run at as fast a pace. It was more conservative, in a sense — slow the ball down, run the ball, that type of thing. Now, we want to be really aggressive on the offensive side.”

That improvement has helped the Irish as a whole, Day said.

He definitely took over the role as a leader on the offense and built them to be a better unit, and he shows that through his vocal skills and his playing,” Day said.

With a small and select resume — a few videos of him working out with Whitfield, footage from this past spring and his 2012 stats — Golson has found himself on the watch lists for the Maxwell, Davey O’Brien and Walter Camp awards this season.

On Saturday, Golson’s teammates, coaches and Irish fans will get their first chance to see if his much-anticipated return and much-discussed improvement will live up to the hype.

As for Golson himself?

He’ll be living in the moment that he’s waited for so long to happen.

“It’s going to be crazy for sure,” he said. “Things like that, they last for maybe 30 seconds to a minute and then you have to dial in on what’s the task at hand. That’s what I’m trying to prepare myself for most is just understanding that the crowd is there but also dialing myself in and performing my task at hand.”

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OWLS PASSING

Rice must replace quarterback Taylor McBargh, who threw for all but 150 of the Owls’ nearly 2,500 passing yards a season ago. Enter redshirt junior signal-caller Dripherus Jackson, who has played in 21 career games but has made only one start during his three seasons with the Owls.

Jackson has completed just 51.8 percent of his career pass attempts (44-for-85), and the Cedar Hill, Texas, native could be without his top target in preseason all-conference receiver Jordan Taylor, who is battling a sore foot. Taylor, who Brian Kelly praised this week as a strong route-runner, has made 24 career starts and has racked up 112 total receptions in the last two seasons combined.

On top of that, Rice finished 2013 with the 103rd-ranked passing offense, averaging 178.2 yards per game. Will the Owls go to the air more in 2014?

Notre Dame’s pass defense certainly takes a hit without junior cornerback KeiVarae Russell, but the Irish are still deep in the secondary. Cody Biggs and Cole Luke shouldn’t have too much trouble holding down the perimeter, and Devin Butler and Matthias Farley can be successful on the interior.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

OWLS RUSHING

The Owls rumbled their way to the 17th-best rushing offense in the country last season, averaging a whopping 227.4 yards per game on the ground. But Rice loses 63 percent of that rushing production with the departures of running back Charles Ross (1,280 yards in 2013), McBargh (464) and running back Turner Peterson (262).

There’s new coordinators all around this season. Kelly praised Rice’s offense for its creativity and innovation in 2013, so the Irish will show flashes of brilliance and moments of ineptitude. It’s to be expected from a team that features five new starters. The Irish are still deep in the secondary. Cody Biggs and Cole Luke shouldn’t have too much trouble holding down the perimeter, and Devin Butler and Matthias Farley can be successful on the interior.

EDGE: NOTRE DAME

OWLS SPECIAL TEAMS

Punter James Farrimond earned a spot on the Ray Gay Award preseason watch list and was a third-team preseason All-Conference USA selection, according to Athlon.

Rice added kicker James Hairston from LSU, whose Hairston handled kickoff duties for three seasons, blasting 88 career touchbacks. Hairston’s leg could help Rice control some of the field position battle.

The loss of Chris Boswell, an All-Conference USA second-team choice in 2013, leaves a void in the field-goal game.

EDGE: RICE

OWLS SCHEDULE (0-0)

Aug. 30: # Notre Dame
Sept. 13: # Texas A&M
Sept. 20: Old Dominion

# Southern Miss.
Oct. 4: Hawaii

# Army
Oct. 25: North Texas
Nov. 1: # Florida International

# UTEP
Nov. 15: # Marshall
Nov. 21: UTEP
Nov. 29: Louisiana Tech

There hasn’t been much Rice chatter of late since news broke of Notre Dame’s ongoing academic investigation. Heck, it took until around the 27-minute mark for Brian Kelly to field a question about the Owls during his Tuesday teleconference.

That’s not to say the Irish are sleeping on Rice. The Owls won 10 games last season and claimed their first-ever Conference USA crown.

But Notre Dame has too much talent across the board. Everett Golson and the offense may need a moment to get going, and the defense likely will give up its share of big plays. However, the Owls could be without 6-foot-5 receiver Jordan Taylor.

The Irish will roll to a 1-0 start.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 31, Rice 17

Notre Dame hasn’t dominated a true home opener since it shut out a Nebraska team led by Colin Kaepernick in 2009.

Since then, the Irish have had three unremarkable home-opener wins, two over Purdue and one over Temple, and an ugly loss to South Florida.

Expect this home opener to be similar to last year’s against Temple, and not just because Rice is also nick-named the Owls.

On offense, the Irish will show flashes of brilliance and moments of ineptitude. It’s to be expected from a team whose quarterback hasn’t played in 600 days.

The Irish defense will show some vulnerability and reveal its lack of depth, but it should handily hold off a Rice team trying to find its identity.

FINAL SCORE: Notre Dame 27, Rice 10

Expect an Irish win, but Rice will hang tough. Rice has an experienced coach in David Bailiff, who starts his eighth season with the Owls. Continuity in leadership should help the Owls settle down early and challenge a Notre Dame team dealing with a large turnover in starters.

It could take the Irish a little longer to find a rhythm in this game, particularly on offense, with Everett Golson seeing his first regular-season action in well more than a year.

The Irish defense will find a consistent stride in well more than a year.
There are a lot of question marks concerning Notre Dame, but none of them will be large enough to garner a Rice victory.

The Irish are inexperienced on defense, which could be worrisome against Rice’s creative offense, but this defensive group is probably the fastest and most athletic South Bend has seen in years.

The offense is fine. Brian Kelly will be calling the shots and finally has the personnel to run the system he came here to implement. With a solid line and talented backs, Notre Dame has seen in years. Kelly praised redshirt freshman Bryce Callahan, who ranks third among returning FBs players with 11 career interceptions. In trusting Callahan, the Owls have the ability to play some man coverage on the perimeter.

Rice’s defense has been improving in recent years under defensive coordinator Chris Thurmord. Between Callahan and fellow defensive backs Julius White, Gabe Baker and Malcolm Hill, the Owls start four seniors with significant prior experience. They won’t be fooled easily by the Irish.

**EDGE: EVEN**

**IRISH RUSHING**

The Owls finished in the middle of the pack defensively last season against the run, allowing 161.4 yards per contest.

Notre Dame must really zero in on containing Owls defensive tackle Christian Covington, who led the team with 11.5 tackles for loss last year as a sophomore. Covington is a preseason third-team All-American, according to Phil Steele, and a consensus pre-season all-conference choice. Kelly said Covington will be one of the better players Notre Dame faces all season long and praised his physicality and constant activity.

But Notre Dame’s running backs are more than a one-man band. In fact, they form a three-headed monster. Expect senior Cam McDaniel and sophomores Greg Bryant and Tarean Folston all to make plays in the season opener. It will be interesting to see how the rotation shakes out and if Kelly and Irish offensive coordinator Mike Denbrock elect to ride the hot hands at certain times.

**EDGE: NOTRE DAME**

**IRISH SPECIAL TEAMS**

Rice is a difficult team to scout with both its placekicking and punt returning units, but Golson, who will be making his first start, should be a worry.

On the other hand, Notre Dame’s special teams have been a point of strength since Kelly took over. It will be interesting to see how the rotation shakes out.

A consensus preseason all-conference returner, Denbrock is in his first season as the Irish special teams coordinator. Expect KeiVarae Russell to return punts for his team and look for an improved performance by the Irish returners.

**EDGE: NOTRE DAME**

**IRISH SCHEDULE (0-0)**

Aug. 30 Rice
  Sept. 6 Michigan
  Sept. 13 vs. Purdue
  Sept. 27 Syracuse
  Oct. 4 Stanford
  Oct. 11 North Carolina
  Oct. 18 @ Florida State
  Nov. 1 vs. Navy
  Nov. 8 @ Arizona State
  Nov. 15 Northwestern
  Nov. 22 Louisville
  Nov. 29 @ USC

Rice had more wins than Notre Dame last season. Rice won its conference for the first time in program history last season. But when Rice comes to Notre Dame Stadium on Saturday to open this season, the on-the-rise program won’t walk away with a win.

That’s not to say the Owls won’t hang with the Irish — this is a squad that bested its opponents by an average of two touchdowns per game in 2013. It’ll take a series or two for the Notre Dame offense to get into rhythm, so the first quarter won’t be the blowout Irish faithful expect.

But once Everett Golson finds his groove and the trio of running backs picks up a few big gains, Notre Dame will be rocking like it’s 2012.

Check out our brand new Notre Dame Football blog.

**FINAL SCORE:** Notre Dame 34, Rice 24
HERE COME THE IRISH!
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Linebackers look to build on legacy

By BRIAN HARTNETT
Managing Editor

Two seasons ago, Notre Dame’s linebacker corps featured a Heisman-trophy runner-up in Manti Te’o, an aggressive pass rusher in Prince Shembo, a versatile defender in Danny Spond and a platoon of experienced seniors in Carlo Calabrese and Dan Fox.

Now, the Irish linebacker position two-deep encompasses the team’s most highly-touted sophomore, a former walk-on, a duo of former secondary players and two true freshmen.

If that change is not enough, the Irish linebackers also have picked up a new defensive scheme in the offseason, switching primarily from a 3-4 to a 4-3 defense under new defensive coordinator Brian VanGorder.

While such changes may seem daunting, Irish senior linebacker Joe Schmidt said they’ve put him and his fellow position players in a position to succeed.

“You could put any player in [the new defense],” Schmidt said. “It provides excellent opportunities for player X. Whatever player we put in that situation is going to be successful, I think.”

Although Schmidt has received accolades from his coaches, much of the outside praise has gone to sophomore Jaylon Smith, who recorded 67 tackles and started every game at outside linebacker in his freshman season. Smith has been named to five national award watch lists, including the Bednarik Award, presented to the best defensive college football player in the country.

“[Smith] has very good football intellect, and he’s a very natural player,” outside linebackers coach Bob Elliott said at the team’s media day Aug. 19. “One thing that’s interesting about Jaylon is that he’s so flexible and athletic that he can get his body into a bad position and still get out of it and make a very good play.”

Expected to play alongside Schmidt and Smith is sophomore James Onwualu, who made stops at receiver and safety before transitioning to the linebacker position. Onwualu’s projected backup is another convert, junior John Turner, who entered Notre Dame as a safety.

“They’re willing to do anything,” Schmidt said of Onwualu and Turner. “They switched positions, which is a humbling experience. … It was pretty cool seeing the growth and the maturation process for both those players, and they’re guys who are going to have a great impact this year.”

Freshmen Nyles Morgan and Greer Martini are also listed on the linebacker two-deep chart. Other potential starters at the position include seniors Jarrett Grace, who continues to recover from a broken leg suffered last season, and Ben Councell.

Schmidt conceded that it will be tough to replace the leadership lost at the linebacker position. But he admitted that he and his teammates are ready to make their own impact.

“These guys in the past built an awesome foundation for us,” Schmidt said. “Those guys who were there with them, … we grew up in that system with those older guys, so we’re building on that and putting our own twist on it. It’s not replacing anything. It’s building everything on top of the foundation, a very solid rock.”

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Irish senior linebacker Joe Schmidt, right, celebrates with sophomore linebacker Jaylon Smith during last season's 14-10 win over USC. Schmidt and Smith will start at linebacker for the Irish in 2014.

Jerusalem’s Future: Peace or Apocalypse

Atalia Omer
Associate Professor of Religion, Conflict and Peace Studies, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies; Department of Sociology

Jerusalem is considered holy and sacred within the three Abrahamic religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is for many a symbol of eternal peace but also a source of earthly violence. This talk will examine why we should reflect on the meanings people have attached to Jerusalem as we try to understand the current violence in Gaza.

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