

## **SPLINTERS FROM THE PRESSBOX - Paul Fullmer '55**

**Irish Bomb Air force, 59 – 33;  
Unveil Running QB, Andrew Hendrix**

It was like the good ol' days of the Lou Holtz era – a blow-out! Up by 18 at the end of the first quarter, 26 at the half and 33 after three quarters when most of the crowd headed for home.

Coach Brian Kelly's offense made an eye-popping statement Saturday in destroying Air Force (4-2) 59 – 33.

Notre Dame (4-2) racked up 560 yards on offense. More importantly, Kelly finally unveiled his running quarterback, Andrew Hendrix, and the sophomore came on stage with a big bang. He not only completed all four of his passes, but was the team's leading rusher as the Irish ripped off their fourth straight victory. The 6-2, 220-pound Hendrix rushed for 111 yards on just six carries, thanks to a 78-yard jaunt that set up a TD in the fourth quarter.

Kelly had to be pleased with the offensive bombardment because it was well balanced – 266 on the ground and 294 through the air. Better yet, for the second straight week, the Irish didn't have a turnover.

"We're getting closer," Kelly said. "We have not arrived. The pieces are starting to come together for us. We're getting there."

The Irish scored touchdowns on all six first-half possessions as Tommy Rees threw scoring passes to four receivers. None of the scoring drives required more than three and a half minutes to get to the end zone.

## **Key Plays Turn Tide Early**

Air Force, which was flying high when it came into South Bend with the third best rushing statistics in the country, again demonstrated that the service academies' option offense still baffles Notre Dame. However, safety Jamoris Slaughter made two huge plays (fumble strip and acrobatic interception) in the first half to thwart the Falcons. Air Force also failed to cover a surprise on-side kick that gave ND a short field and another open door for a score.

It's a good thing that Slaughter had a career game because Air Force could have stayed right with the Irish. Kelly's crew got suckered on a fake punt, drew an off-side penalty on a field goal try that led to an Air force TD, while giving up an unbelievable 311 yards to the visitors in just 30 minutes.

Good thing the offense was clicking on all cylinders. Quarterback Rees had one of the best games of his short ND career – connecting on 23 of 32 for 261 yards and four scores. Theo Riddick emerged from Michael Floyd's shadow to make key receptions and back-up tailback Jonas Gray again displayed his running power. The senior even is beginning to attract NFL attention.

## **Falcons Attack Highly-Ranked Defense**

Defensive coordinator Bob Diaco's unit, which came into the game allowing only 91 yards per game on the ground, had a game to forget Saturday. The Falcons ate up huge chunks of turf against the slow-to-react Irish defenders. The numbers don't lie – Air Force gained 303 rushing yards in 60 carries... 565 total yards (five more than ND and 32 first downs. The Falcons ran 88 offensive plays to Notre Dame's 65. Truly ugly numbers.

"At the end of the day, you don't win games off of yards produced," ND safety Harrison Smith said. "You win games off of points. We had more points than they did."

Here's Kelly's take on the defense, "Yeah, there are areas that we can clean up, but you know we were not going to give up big plays. That was really the way we set our defense, was that if they were going to get it, they were going to have to earn it all the way down the field."

### **Numbers Can Be Misleading**

Although the gritty Air Force team slugged it out with the Irish from the start, it was a mismatch, much like a good middle weight in the ring against an accomplished heavy weight.

The Irish built a 26 point half time lead in one of the most explosive 30 minute offensive performances in stadium history. Air Force tacked on 17 meaningless points in the fourth quarter against Kelly's reserves. At one point, the Irish were ahead 59 – 19.

"There's still many areas to iron out," Kelly said. "We've got to get more consistent in special teams. We have glimmers of really good play. We obviously have got to tighten things down defensively with our younger guys and then just play with more consistency. Four in a row is not enough for this group, but I like the direction that we are going."

The youngsters found out the perils of playing the option – it's like walking through a mine field, never knowing when one will explode. Air Force QB Tim Jefferson, who had an outstanding game, pointed to costly penalties and turnovers that shut down the Falcons on crucial drives. He's already looking forward to next year's rematch, so the Irish better be on their toes when they travel to Colorado Springs in 2012.

## **Fantastic Start For Rees, Irish**

It took Rees less than three minutes to march his team to its first score – 81 yards on eight plays. He covered the last 34 with a highlight reel pass to Floyd, who leaped over defenders and clipped the pylon on the way downs for a 7 – 0 lead.

On the Falcons' first series, Slaughter ran down Asher Clark who had broken into the clear, and stripped the ball out. With one of many short fields, Rees hit Tyler Eifert with a five-yard scoring pass.

After Air Force kicked a field goal to make it 14 – 3, George Atkinson ripped off a 40-yard return and Robby Toma (Manti Te'o's Hawaiian high school classmate) caught a 10-yard scoring pass when subbing for Floyd to make it 21 – 3 after one quarter.

Air Force retaliated with a long 80-yard scoring drive, but ND quickly scored two more touchdowns to make it 35 – 9 and put the game in the ice box. The Falcons tried to surprise ND with an on-side kick, but Bennett Jackson leaped over bodies to get it for Notre Dame and set up another short 38-yard scoring drive. Jonas Gray roared in from five yards out for one score and Cierre Wood matched his running mate with an eight yarder that was set up by Slaughter's interception of a pass he initially tipped.

The never-say-die Falcons got up off the turf and came right back, marching 80 yards through the Irish to make it 35 – 16. To close out the first half scoring, receiving star Riddick took a 24-yarder from Rees with just 32 seconds to go to make it 42 – 16 at the intermission! The first half total was only seven points short of the 49 dumped on Pitt in 1968.

Riddick was a big part of the first half onslaught and ended with a game-high eight receptions for 83 yards and a TD, plus a 14-yard run.

With Floyd, Riddick, TJ Jones and Eifert, Rees and Hendrix have four big targets that will be hard for any defense to stop for an entire game.

### **Fans Head For Exits Early In Second Half**

The only people really interested in the second half were parents of Notre Dame's reserve players, who would finally get some playing time in this lop-sided game.

Many who had sat in the 82 degree sun for several hours began heading to the parking lots or the air-conditioned Joyce Center that had a giant TV screen.

ND still was on fire in the third quarter. Sophomore Hendrix brought the crowd to its feet with runs of 14 and 12 yards before Gray completed the six play, 64-yard drive with a 6-yard scoring romp to make it 49 – 16 at the end of the third quarter. The teams traded field goals in the fourth quarter that changed the scoreboard to 52 – 19.

The remaining fans went crazy when Hendrix got loose and rambled 78 yards to the two before he ran out of gas. Atkinson got his first rushing TD and walk-on senior Mike Grieco got a chance to boot the extra point and make it 59 – 19. It was a gracious gesture to allow the senior player to score a point in an ND uniform. The never-quit Cadets then put together two long scoring drives against the Irish subs to come up with the final score of 59 – 33 to make the score look closer than it really was.

### **Still Some Major Questions**

ND fans still have some questions for Kelly and his staff:

- **Why can't ND ever stop an option attack after playing service academies every year?**
- **How come a smaller Air Force team can make every fourth down conversion?**

- **Why are first stringers still playing when the team was ahead by 33 points?**

### **Bye-Week Before Huge USC Match-up**

Kelly now has two weeks to prepare for the critical nationally-televised night game with USC. The Trojans are rebounding and have the offense to duke it out with Notre Dame. No accident, however, that Kelly introduced Hendrix against Air Force because now Trojan coach Lane Kiffin has one more wrinkle to address defensively – a mobile quarterback who can both pass and run.

“We are just going to continue to utilize Hendrix to strengthen Tommy’s hand,” Kelly said. “And now with both of those guys, and Tommy is obviously playing 85 to 90 % of the game, it just gives us another dimension of our offense.”

Diacio and the defensive staff have a lot of work to do to get their unit back on track after failing to contain the Falcons. Although it wasn’t as bad as the numbers indicate, because the reserves yielded a lot of yards and points, ND has to be ready for a dynamic USC passing game. A big win over their traditional rival before a large TV audience could vault the Irish into the top 25. Kelly and his team would like nothing better.

Go Irish!

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