

SPLINTERS FROM THE PRESSBOX - Paul Fullmer '55

No Surprise – ND Going To Champs Sport Bowl

Whooopeee!

Coach Brian Kelly's puzzling team that has ricocheted through a roller-coaster year will be in a Bowl. No, it's not a BCS Bowl as many had expected in the coach's second year. As rumored for weeks, ND will be in the Champs Sports Bowl in Orlando for a night game on December 29.

In previous years, the matchup – Notre Dame vs. Florida State – would be a major draw. This year it will be a big yawn as two 8-4 teams limp into post-season play, hoping only that their fortunes will improve in 2012.

It won't be a marquee game with Lou Holtz matching wits with the fabled Bobby Bowden. No, it will be the humbled Kelly jousting with another guy having trouble with the national spotlight, Jimbo Fisher.

The Seminoles, who don't have their usual offensive fire power but do have an outstanding defense, tied for second in the ACC with a 5-3 record. In their final game, the Seminoles flattened arch-rival Florida 21-7. At the same time, Kelly's Irish were trampled by Stanford.

FSU leads the Irish 4-2 in their over-all play and thrashed ND 37-0 in the 2003 Orange Bowl in the two teams' last Bowl clash.

Right now, the big question is whether Kelly will tap long-time starter Tommy Rees or exciting sophomore Andrew Hendrix as his starting quarterback for the Bowl game. The starter obviously will automatically have a lock on the job for next season.

As predicted here, the logjam at quarterback has prompted senior QB Dayne Crist to take his last year of eligibility somewhere else in hopes to recreate the Wisconsin miracle that transformed a senior transfer signal-caller into a hot NFL prospect.

Sadly, after watching the conference championship games, it's apparent just how much the Irish need to improve to make it to a BCS Bowl. Kelly and his staff have plenty of work to do in the next year.

Go Irish!

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