

SPLINTERS FROM THE PRESSBOX - Paul Fullmer '55

ND Basketball Teams On Roll

Note to football coach Brian Kelly: If you want to win the big games on your treacherous 2012 schedule, add a line item to your budget to cover a three week cruise for good old Splinters.

Why?

While gone on a South American cruise in January, the women's basketball team continued their amazing winning streak that has now reached 17 and the men dumped #1 Syracuse in a stunner.

Mike Brey's surprising Irish (13 – 8); Big East (5 – 3), thrilled home town fans by snapping Syracuse's 20-game win streak, 67 – 58, knocking the Orange Men off their #1 pedestal in the process. It was one wild and crazy celebration on the Purcell Pavilion court!

Mike Brey's young, re-tooled squad shot 50%, hit eight 3-pointers and out-rebounded the eastern juggernaut by 13.

"This is why you play," senior Scott Martin said. "This is what you dream about when you're a little kid. You watch this stuff on TV growing up, fans rushing the floor. I can't put it into words. It's unbelievable."

The Irish followed up by smothering Seton Hall 55 – 42, the fewest points the Pirates have scored in seven years.

Meanwhile, Muffet McGraw's women continue to mow down everyone in sight, registering 17 straight victories and trampling long-time nemesis Tennessee 72 – 44. The #7 Lady Vols were boasting about 20 consecutive wins over ND until last year's 'upset' in the Elite Eight NCAA game. The motivated Irish demolished Tennessee, holding them to the lowest point total in school history.

McGraw's team certainly has earned its #2 ranking with tremendous defense and unselfish team play.

ND Extends Kelly's Contract Through 2016

To the dismay of many, AD Jack Swarbrick decided to reward Brian Kelly for two lackluster 8 – 5 seasons and a Bowl loss. Kelly got a two-year extension which means Kelly is in South Bend until 2016, which may be a great move... or maybe another costly one. Notre Dame has shelled out a lot of dough to Tyrone Willingham and Charlie Weis after dumping them. And 2012 could be a real good indication on how good Kelly is because the schedule is tougher than an Afghan mine field.

“Our football team’s performance on the field, in the classroom, and in the community reflect Coach Kelly’s commitment to building a program that will be able to sustain success in the long run and to doing so in a manner consistent with Notre Dame’s values and traditions,” said Swarbrick.

Kelly has been busy rebuilding his coaching staff. Charley Molnar, the offensive coordinator, left to take the head coaching job at Massachusetts. He’s being replaced by Chuck Martin, who has been coaching the safeties. A defensive coach tapped to be the top offensive guy???

Kelly hired veteran Bob Elliott to coach safties, and he certainly has his work cut out for him with so many regulars graduating. Harry Hiestand, who has both college and NFL experience, replaces Ed Warinner as offensive line coach. Interestingly, Urban Meyer poached Warinner and running backs coach Tim Hinton for his Ohio State staff.

Kelly Finally Lands Quarterback

If you think Mitt Romney is a ‘flipper’, Gunner Kiel, may top him. The #1 quarterback prospect in the country finally decided to play close to his Indiana home by enrolling at ND for the Spring quarter. Initially, he declared for Indiana, but his brother is already trying to be the Hoosiers’ signal caller, so maybe he asked Gunner to go somewhere else. Then Kiel took the safe route and declared for perennial power LSU. But, then fate - or Kelly - stepped in and he changed his mind again, saying he wanted a school with good academics close to home.

So, the Gunner will be firing for the Irish after all. Yes, the 6-4, 215 pounder who has directed a spread offense during his spectacular prep career, is a nephew of Blair Kiel, who quarterbacked ND in the 1980s. Maybe Uncle Blair deserves some credit for landing the prize recruit. In any case, his official signing will give Kelly one of the best recruiting classes in the country. More importantly, he now has a great freshman quarterback prospect to develop for the future. Veteran Tommy Rees will return, but he will be pressed by more agile sophomores Andrew

Hendrix and Everett Golson. Many think Golson will get the nod next year because he was recruited personally by Kelly.

All of a sudden, the sun is shining again in South Bend. Let's hope McGraw and Brey can continue to rack up wins and head into the NCAA tournament with real momentum.

Go Irish!

Paul 'Splinters' Fullmer
psfullmer@gmail.com