

SPLINTERS FROM THE PRESSBOX - Paul Fullmer '55

Lights Out For Irish In Shocking Fourth Quarter;

Robinson Rallies Michigan To An Unbelievable 35 - 31 Win

It was a nightmare!

There are tough losses... and then there are dagger-through-the-heart nasties.

In the first night game in Big House history, a record 114,804 screaming fans watched in amazement as the Irish let a 17-point lead slip away. Michigan (2 – 0) scored the winning TD with just two seconds to go to snatch away victory from the bewildered Irish, 35 – 31.

In a re-run of last year's Denard Robinson Show, when the mercurial Michigan quarterback amassed 502 yards, the Irish-created super star led the fourth quarter surge and finished with 'only' 446 yards this time.

The dazed and winless ND team has to face some frightening facts after letting this winnable game slither away:

- Experienced secondary appears clueless
- Five turnovers, two in the Red Zone
- Nine penalties, several at the worst possible time
- Unable to protect a 17-point fourth quarter lead
- Failed to protect lead after scoring with just 30 seconds to go

Crisis Situation For Kelly's Irish

Coach Brian Kelly, who expected and promised progress in his second year, now has an 0-2 team that doesn't seem to know how to win.

"There's not one individual in that locker room, including all the coaches, that's good enough right now," Kelly said. "And, consequently, we lost a football game."

The embattled coach added, "I mean across the board. It's turnovers, it's sub-par special teams play, it's the inability to make a stop. It's all those things. I pretty much told our football team that when we're better, we'll start winning."

The last-play loss was particularly hard to swallow because the Irish dominated the game for three periods, rolling into the fourth quarter with a 24 – 7 lead. But, Robinson was building steam and the Irish were feeling tightness around their collars.

Rees Just Seconds Away From Hero Role

Sophomore quarterback Tommy Rees was just a few seconds away from ND iconic stature. He hit Theo Riddick with a 29-yard scoring pass to rally his team after Michigan had roared ahead with 21 straight points. Rees needed only four plays to cover 61 yards in just 35 seconds. Although the Irish had a precarious 31 – 28 lead, Michigan still had Robinson and 30 seconds. He only needed 28 to turn the lights out on the Irish.

Rees had a good day passing, but his miscues (two interceptions, one in the Red Zone, and a lost fumble on his own seven when the ball slipped out of his hand, really were crushers. If the Irish had put up points on those two drives, the green -shirted fans would have been jumping for joy at the end.

Rees, who lost for the first time in five starts, finished 27-of-39 for 315 yards and three touchdowns. All-American Michael Floyd caught a career-high 13. Cierre Wood ran for 134 yards on 25 carries and a TD.

First Half Performance Encourages ND Fans

ND looked to be in complete control in the first half, quickly taking a 14 – 0 lead on a Rees to Riddick pass and an eight yard burst by Wood up the middle. At half time, Notre Dame led 17 – 7 and Robinson had completed just two passes and run for a manageable 40 yards. During the intermission, however, Michigan Coach Brady Hoke was smart enough to go into the files and find last year's play book that basically allows Robinson to play sandlot style – "Give me the ball and I'll make a play." And, he did as the Irish defenders froze in the lights.

Fourth Quarter One To Forget

After Rees connected with TJ Jones on a nifty crossing pattern to put the Irish up 24 – 7, Robinson started his heroics. The Irish got a bad break when their goal line defense stuffed a play and caused a fumble, but the ever-alert Robinson scooped it up and scored the TD on his own to make it 24 – 14. After a three-and-out and a shanked ND punt, the red-hot Robinson hooked up with Jeremy Galloon for a 64-yard TD to close the gap to 24 – 21, and Notre Dame fans began to get very anxious.

The teams then traded punts before Robinson got the Wolverines on the move again, finally hitting Vincent Smith for the go-ahead touchdown and a 28-24 lead.

That's when Rees answered with his 29-yard scoring throw to Riddick that put the Irish up

31-28 with 30 seconds to go.

Robinson only needed 28 seconds. He capped off Michigan's 28-point fourth quarter scoring barrage that sunk the Irish with an unbelievable 80-yard drive in just three plays. Everyone thought Michigan would be playing for a field goal that would send the game into overtime, but the ND defense was so bamboozled by that time, that Robinson went for broke at the 16 with time running out and found Roy Roundtree for the game winner that broke the hearts of ND fans.

With the amazing turnaround, Robinson had not only erased the big Irish lead to grab a sweet victory, but destroyed Notre Dame's hopes for a successful year. It was a crushing loss for Kelly's squad.

Undefeated Spartans Loom Large

The undefeated Spartans of Michigan State come into South Bend with momentum after walloping several minor league teams. They'll be licking their chops as the wounded Irish stagger home and attempt to right the ship. Kelly had promised the Irish would be ready to play at Ann Arbor. They were... for three quarters.

Irish fans are heating up the wires with questions about what is happening this season:

- What happened with fundamentals, especially in the defensive backfield?
- Why do the Irish open with confidence and then melt down when Kelly brought in his ballyhooed Strength Team to assure strong fourth quarter performance?
- How come the experienced team commits so many penalties and turnovers?
- When will ND ever outscore a top opponent in the second half?
- Is this team so fragile because of Kelly's volatile style that it could completely implode?

Saturday should provide some answers. Doubt whether the Irish would choose to ruin the Mini-Reunion of the ND Class of '55 by not smashing the Spartans.

Go Irish!

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