

SPLINTERS FROM THE PRESSBOX - Paul Fullmer '55

Chalk One Up For The Defense; Offense Wakes Up In Time To Nip Pitt 15 – 12

The Survivors!

Maybe that should be the name on this year's Notre Dame football shirt. After another weird game that produced a 15 – 12 win over Pittsburgh, the country's fans and the team must be wondering if they are as bad as the offense looked in the first three quarters or as good as the defense looked all afternoon. Coach Brian Kelly and his team barely escaped without an embarrassing defeat and a second straight 1-3 start to the season.

Quarterback Tommy Rees and the offense didn't wake up until late in the fourth quarter when the young sophomore finally adjusted his GPS to complete 8 of 8 passes for 74 yards on an 11-play drive that covered 85 yards. He topped it off with completions to tight end Tyler Eifert, the receiving star of the game, for both the TD and 2-pointer with 4:40 to go. In typical Irish fashion, ND (2-2) allowed Pitt (2-2) to scare the daylight out of the green-clad fans in the final minutes.

A relieved Kelly said, "I would have liked to have won 37 – 0, but you know what? A win is a win. It's not easy. Go on the road against a BCS team and limit them to 12 points and find a way to win." Kelly added, "I liked the team's development. We're developing an expectation of our guys that in a close game we're going to win. Those are great dynamics. So we put this behind us and believe it or not, we have expectations that we want to win every game."

Why Didn't Irish Roll Up Score Against Weak Pitt Defense?

Many ND fans were expecting a big offensive day from the Irish against one of the worst defenses in the country, but the Panthers had a plan to thwart Rees:

- **Blanket star receiver Michael Floyd on every play**

- **Pressure Rees constantly because he's prone to turnovers (costly Red Zone interception and fumble Saturday)**

TV analyst Urban Meyer, who many wanted as the Notre Dame Coach, spent the afternoon telling viewers what coach Kelly should be doing – spreading the ball around.

Eventually Kelly and Rees got the message and Eifert ended up with eight receptions for 85 yards and the winning TD and 2-pointer. Theo Riddick finished with six catches and TJ Jones had three.

Rees rebounded in the second half and had 24 of 41 for 216 yards and a touchdown, but he really looked good on the last drive.

After Floyd caught three passes on Notre Dame's first drive, he didn't get his fourth reception until the fourth quarter, finishing with just 27 yards.

Somehow this veteran ND team continued to shoot itself in the feet in crucial situations and failed to take advantage of opportunities.

Saturday the mistakes continued to pile up - interception, fumble, botched field goal attempt, roughing the punter, holding, hand in the face, etc.

The Irish offense handed the Panthers all their points. After stripping Rees in the first quarter, the Panthers got close enough for a field goal. Early in the third quarter ND was flagged for roughing the punter and Pitt scored a short field TD.

Without those gifts, the Notre Dame 'D' would have been better than this – only one offensive TD or less allowed in seven of its last eight games.

Gray Dazzles With Long TD Run

Jonas Gray, who endured Kelly's sideline wrath for fumbling on the goal line against Michigan, redeemed himself Saturday early by roaring around right end and sprinting 79 yards to put the Irish up 7 – 3. Pittsburgh tacked on another field

goal to make it 7 – 6 and many thought Kelly would replace Rees at the half after a shaky first 30 minutes (12 of 27).

Kelly, however, was impressed with Rees' five completions at the end of the first half that culminated in a missed field goal. "At the end of the half," Kelly said, "he did some really good things, in terms of throwing the football. You look at Rees and he knows what's going on out there. You don't feel like he's rattled. You never sense that, or feel that with Tommy." Here's Rees' evaluation of the first half, "I made some mistakes that stopped some drives and put kind of a halt to some of our offensive momentum. I just wanted to come out and play well in the second half. I knew the guys were counting on me. It was time to step up and make some plays for our offense."

Nail Biter Down To End

After a roughing penalty enabled Pitt to continue a 19-play scoring drive and make it 12 – 7, (ND stuffed two-point attempt), the season was on the line. It took a fiery speech from linebacker Manti Te'o (12 straight games with 10 or more tackles) to get the offense ready for the game-winning drive. "I just said a couple of things like 'this is what we worked for all summer. It all comes down to this.'" Te'o summarized

Even after Rees hooked up with Eifert for eight points and the 15 – 12 lead, with four minutes to go, Pitt made things interesting. But Kelly's freshman prodigies Stephon Tuitt and Aaron Lynch geared up for a big sack. The Irish had six sacks for the day, their largest total since the 2008 Hawaii Bowl.

The Panthers got the ball back with time to score but the defense held again and Rees sneaked for a huge first down on the home team's 35 to clinch the victory.

Key Plays Swing Game To ND

Hustle on key plays sure helped ND escape Pittsburgh with its 15 – 12 victory

- **When star running back Ray Graham broke away from his 5-yard line in the second quarter, linebacker Prince Shembo turned on the jets to catch Graham. Four plays later the drive stalled and the Irish gained the ball and escaped a bullet**
- **In the second quarter, ND's defense again held and forced the field goal and prevented six points from going on the board**
- **With less than three minutes to go and ND up by just three, replay over turned the incomplete pass call on the field and gave Shembo an 11-yard sack that took away Pitt's field position and a shot at a game-tying field goal**
- **The big sack by freshmen Tuitt and Lynch, especially since Lynch had been switched from defensive end to nose guard for exactly this kind of pass-rushing situation**
- **Rees' quarterback sneak for a first down that sealed the win**

The Irish outgained Pittsburgh 298 – 268 and held Graham, the nation's fifth-leading rusher, to a season-low 89 yards on 21 carries.

Purdue Hosts Another Night Game

Kelly takes his Irish to Purdue this weekend for the team's second night game and ND fans hope the lights don't go out at the end like they did in Michigan. The Boilermakers (2 - !) have pummeled a couple of patsies and lost to Rice. But, Coach Danny Hope had a bye week to prepare for this game and you can bet he'll be looking at Pitt's defensive game plan. If the Irish can learn to make at least four yards on first down to make the play calling a lot simpler for Rees, the offense should have a big day on the scoreboard at West Lafayette. You can bet that Mr. Floyd wants to get back into the action and the contest for All-American honors.

Go Irish!

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