

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

### **Electrical Storm Suspends Play For Almost Three Hours;**

### **Skip Holtz, South Florida Shock Stunned Irish 23 – 20**

Bizarre!

Electrical storms lit up the South Bend skies and forced total evacuation of the Stadium twice during nearly seven hours of agony for ND fans Saturday. A very happy USF coach Skip Holtz, a Notre Dame grad and former assistant coach under his Dad Lou, flew back to Tampa with a surprising 23 – 20 victory.

Saturday's weather delays were the first in the 123-year history of the ND football program. The two Athletic Directors agreed to ground rules for the half time delay – neither team watches videos of the first half; both teams receive the same nutrition during the holdup.

Saturday had to be like a bad dream for ND coach Brian Kelly, whose #16 Irish came into the game as an 11 point favorite on its home turf. However, the experienced ND team committed every venial and mortal sin possible in the home opener - fumbles... penalties... dropped passes... sub-par kicking... mental mistakes... and on and on.

Trailing 16 – 0 at the half when the first monsoon struck, Kelly and his staff had over two hours to come up with some answers and get back in the game. He yanked starting quarterback Dayne Crist, who was off target on every possession and replaced him with last year's relief pitcher, Tommy Rees. The cool sophomore woke up the offense in the second half, but again physical and mental mistakes prevented a miraculous comeback.

### **Four Key Plays Turn Around Game**

ND opened confidently, marching downfield smartly until they got inside the five. For some reason, Kelly replaced Cierre Wood, who had a great day (104 yds on 21 carries and a TD), with Jonas Gray. The 5-10 second stringer, not exactly the classic fullback or short yardage specialist, got stripped in a scrum and the Bulls' Kayvon Webster zipped 96 yards for a TD that stunned the crowd and took the starch out of the Irish.

In the second half, the Irish showed some signs of life under Rees' leadership and went for two points when it was 23 – 13 to get within one score, but the QB overthrew Michael Floyd in the end zone.

Earlier usually dependable kicker David Ruffer missed both an extra point and field goal. Those four points could have sure helped at the hectic finish when the Irish drew within three.

## **Red Zone Disaster Zone For Irish**

No matter who was at quarterback, the Irish seemed to develop an itchy rash when they got into the Red Zone, picking up five of their eight penalties inside the opponent's 20. Crist also threw an interception in the first half when trying to find triple-teamed Floyd for a score.

Sure, ND could've won, but they didn't deserve it the way they played in the first half. You can't shoot yourself in the foot that much and against a good team and expect to win. And, yes, USF under Holtz is a good team, selected by many to win the Big East.

Holtz had his team ready to play and Kelly failed to have the Irish prepared to deal with an under-rated team that was sky high.

## **Too Much Green Kool-Aid for Some**

After the 173 minutes of delays, there were still plenty of 'coulda... woulda... shoulda' fans.

- "We coulda won if we had scored on that first drive instead of fumbling away a 96-yard TD that was a 14 point swing."
- "We woulda won if we hadn't thrown three interceptions, two in the Red Zone."
- "We shoulda won if we hadn't had five turnovers and eight penalties."

Kelly admitted, "You can't win playing like that." The angry coach who took out his rage on the culprits right on the sidelines in full view of stadium fans and millions on TV, added, "The chaos was on the field today."

Sure, Notre Dame's offensive output of 508 yards doubled South Florida's 254, but the penalties and turnovers ruined the day more than the storm. "This is not the end for us at all," defensive end Kapron Lewis -Moore told reporters." We shall see.

## **Much Work To Be Done This Week**

Kelly and his staff hadn't expected to have to backtrack and spend this week rebuilding team confidence rather than focusing on revitalized Michigan in the Big House.

Kelly has to address some major questions:

- Who is his quarterback? - Crist did not look like a major team's starting quarterback Saturday. He was off target and only completed 7 of 15 for 95 yards. The veteran also had one interception and some costly overthrows. Some observers believe that Saturday doomed Crist's future at ND and that Kelly has been looking for an excuse to bench him permanently. Will he go to Rees, who led the Irish to four straight wins last year? Against South Florida, Rees came on to complete 24 of 34 passes in the second half for 396 yards and two touchdowns. Unfortunately, the sophomore also threw two picks. Or, will Kelly by-pass both Crist and Rees and go to sophomore Andrew Hendrix or freshman Everett Golson, both of whom are threats

with their legs as well as their arm. It will be VERY interesting to see who Kelly chooses to start in Ann Arbor. That decision might be pivotal to whether ND can rebound and still win a BCS Bowl bid.

- What happened to the kicking game? - Veteran punter Ben Turk had a couple of poor kicks early in the game to give the Bulls good field position. Will he lose his job to hot-shot freshman Kyle Brindza? Usually dependable David Ruffer missed both an EP and FG. Nick Trausch is ready to step in, as is freshman Brindza.
- Are Notre Dame's other receivers as shaky as they looked Saturday? - Sure, Floyd had a monster game (12 catches for 154 yards and two TDs), but the other receivers have to step up. Theo Riddick had several drops and fumbled a punt deep in his own territory to set up one of South Florida's three field goals.

All in all, Saturday's opener was a perfect definition of Murphy's Law – "If something bad could happen, it did."

### **Too Little, Too Late In Fourth Quarter**

After the long intermission, fans made their way back to the Stadium from the ACC and other buildings surrounding the Stadium. The crowd, which had booed Kelly and the team off the field at the end of the half, welcomed Rees with cheers in the third quarter because they thought the Irish could still pull it off.

Rees did march the Irish down to the five, but they self-destructed just as they did on their opening drive. TJ Jones was not looking for the ball that bounced off his helmet and was picked off to kill the scoring drive that would have given the Irish much-needed momentum. Kelly almost popped a blood vessel chewing out Jones when he came to the bench.

Rees came back with another drive and hit Floyd on a nice 'go' pattern to make it 16 – 7. On the next drive the Irish were looking for a knockout, but then David Ruffer, who had made 23 straight field goals last year, had his 30 yard attempt sail left.

Given life, the Bulls chewed up five minutes driving 80 yards in 14 plays to make it 23 – 7.

The Irish still had hopes when Wood banged in from the one to make it 23 – 13 with 4:21 to go.

After holding USF, Rees threw an interception to take the air out of the crowd. But, the Irish got the ball again, and a Rees-to-Floyd touchdown connection made it 23 – 20. With just 21 seconds to go, the Irish almost recovered an onside kick which could've led to an even longer game and a miraculous finish. At that point, those hardy souls remaining in the Stadium probably would have brought in their camping supplies.

### **Huge Challenge In Ann Arbor**

Kelly could use a bye week right now to get his team back on an even keel. The first-ever night game at the Big House in Ann Arbor against a juiced Wolverine team isn't

exactly a normal second game. New coach Brady Hoke has Michigan fans believing again and more than 110,000 fans will be raising the roof. Kelly had better have his charges ready for a BIG challenge. The Wolverines are led by quarterback Denard Robinson, the jitterbug QB who ran and passed ND silly last year. He'll want to repeat that performance to prove that the Wolverines are a legitimate Big Ten title contender.

It will be a full-scale war Saturday night at Michigan and ND fans will be anxious to see if Kelly has the touch to restore his veteran team's confidence.

Go Irish!

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