

PASS 53

Notre Dame Takes to the Friendly Skies and Wallops Michigan State

by J. Bradley Keck

In this third week of the season, the Irish traveled to Michigan State with a lot of items on the agenda. Notre Dame had tied the week before against the University of Michigan, 17-17. Head coach Lou Holtz was severely criticized for playing for the tie, as the Irish became very conservative with the football as they regained possession in the closing seconds. As a result of this and their poor play at Northwestern (despite scoring a 42-7 victory) Notre Dame fell in the polls. This was to be expected, but as an added tweak to a frustrated leprechaun's nose, the Irish were ranked behind the Wolverines. Notre Dame had to regain their composure quickly and came to East Lansing looking to avenge the previous weeks' performances.

With little in their favor, Notre Dame could only pull behind their coach and fight the long battle to regain some respect. The Irish also knew that they needed to get back on the field and play almost flawless football for the rest of the season if they had any hope of posturing themselves for a National Championship bid. Unfortunately for Michigan State, this new Irish resolve would only hasten their demise.

Holtz knew that there was a lot at stake but was not willing to tip his hand as to how the

Irish would regain the respect that had been swept from beneath them the previous week. On the Friday night before the game, Holtz took his players through a relaxation and visualization session. This type of drill Holtz uses every evening before a game. It is an exercise designed to let players lay back and see themselves performing their assignments, making tackles and generally succeeding on the field. These sessions help build confidence, help players to say, "Yes, I can play the perfect game," and help them to mentally see themselves doing so.

The night before the Michigan State game, Holtz asked all of the players to visualize the first play of the game. He did not tell the players which play to visualize. He only asked them to pick any play and see themselves executing their particular assignment on that play perfectly. The results were extraordinary.

The next morning, Holtz approached quarterback Rick Mirer and asked him what play he had imagined the previous evening.

"He said 'Pass 53,'" recalled Holtz.

Pass 53 was an interesting choice for Mirer. This pass play is centered around a deep middle pass rout by the wide out. The play, one of offensive coordinator Skip Holtz's favorites, had not been used by the Irish since the Southern Cal game last season. Due to Holtz's conservative style of

football, it seemed the most unlikely of plays bugging me to put that sucker back in."

From that "dream" of a first play onward, the Irish would not relent in their use of the offensive fire-power encapsulated by Pass 53. In the first quarter alone, Mirer passed for a total of 144 yards while completing six of his first seven pass attempts. This would not be a Saturday for ties.

The first offensive series for the Irish — beginning with Pass 53 — ended with a touchdown pass from Mirer to Oscar McBride. In what would foreshadow Mirer's three passing touchdowns in a little more than two quarters of work, Notre Dame's quarterback pulled within two tosses of Joe Theismann's career touchdown mark with the 4-yard pass to McBride.

Mirer's second touchdown in the air came at the conclusion of the very next series. Again Mirer went to his favorite target of the day, Dawson, and found him in the end zone for a 7-yard scoring strike. Mirer was now only one touchdown away from Theismann's record.

The record was almost tied immediately in Notre Dame's third possession of the first quarter. After overthrowing Dawson on first down (Mirer's only incompleteness of the quarter), the Irish went right back to the air. Again the target of Mirer's crosshairs was Dawson, and again Mirer's arm was true.

Dawson caught the ball for a gain of 59 yards before being forced out-of-bounds by Spartans free safety Todd Murry.

As many balls as Mirer could throw, Dawson was willing to catch against Michigan State. On the day the Mirer-Dawson connection teamed up for five completions and 126 yards.

"I hope it's going to be like that in the future," Mirer said. "We've seen that throwing the ball downfield works, and I think that coach has wanted to do it for a long time."

"I love to see our offense work like that," echoed Dawson. "It shows we're very versatile and can hurt you in a lot of ways."

Notre Dame did indeed hurt the struggling Spartans (3-11 over the last two seasons coming into the game) in a number of ways. Two plays after Dawson's second big catch, Mirer found Clint Johnson for a 23-yard gain. Then Lee Becton cruised into the end zone for a 4-yard gain and Notre Dame's first rushing touchdown of the afternoon. The third touchdown of the first quarter for the Irish put the score at 21-3 at the close of the stanza.

A field goal by Michigan State's Jim Del Verne was the only time that the Spartans even got close to the Irish end zone in the first quarter. Their offense gained only 54 yards, and quarterback Jim Miller had one pass picked off by Irish secondary star Tom Carter.

Notre Dame's defense was also rallying after the return of their captain Demetrius DuBose from his two game NCAA suspension. DuBose, in his first series back in the Blue and Gold, broke up two passes and made one tackle.

"It felt strange — real strange," said DuBose after the game. "But it also felt absolutely great."

DuBose's return was great indeed for the Irish defense. He led the team with ten tackles and showed that he had not lost the form which had earned him a preseason All-American nomination.

After Carter's interception, the Irish had control of the ball going into the second period. Three plays and 34 seconds later, Mirer went deep once

again, this time finding the other Irish receiver who had also dreamed of Pass 53, Ray Griggs, for a 39-yard touchdown. This touchdown continued Notre Dame's air superiority over the Spartans, and put Mirer's name right beside the legendary Joe Theismann's in the record books for the most passing touchdowns in the history of Irish football.

With his career total now at 31 touchdown tosses, Mirer was beaming after the game.

"It was fun out there today," said Mirer.

It was not only fun for Mirer, but also for Holtz, who was uncharacteristically positive after watching his quarterback tie Theismann's record, passing for a total of 260 yards.

"Rick Mirer was absolutely brilliant out there today," said Holtz. "This was a day where we had two and a half quarters ofensively you won't see very often. ... I

would have liked to have run the football better; we only threw the ball more because we couldn't run the football."

Along with Mirer's brilliance, some other players had some impressive performances. Jerome Bettis had 76 yards on 14 carries, including three plays totaling 23 yards to close the first quarter. Griggs had three catches for a total of 78 yards, including the 39-yard touchdown grab. Craig Hentrich also kicked a 26-yard field goal on the only possession of the first half in which the Irish did not find the end zone.

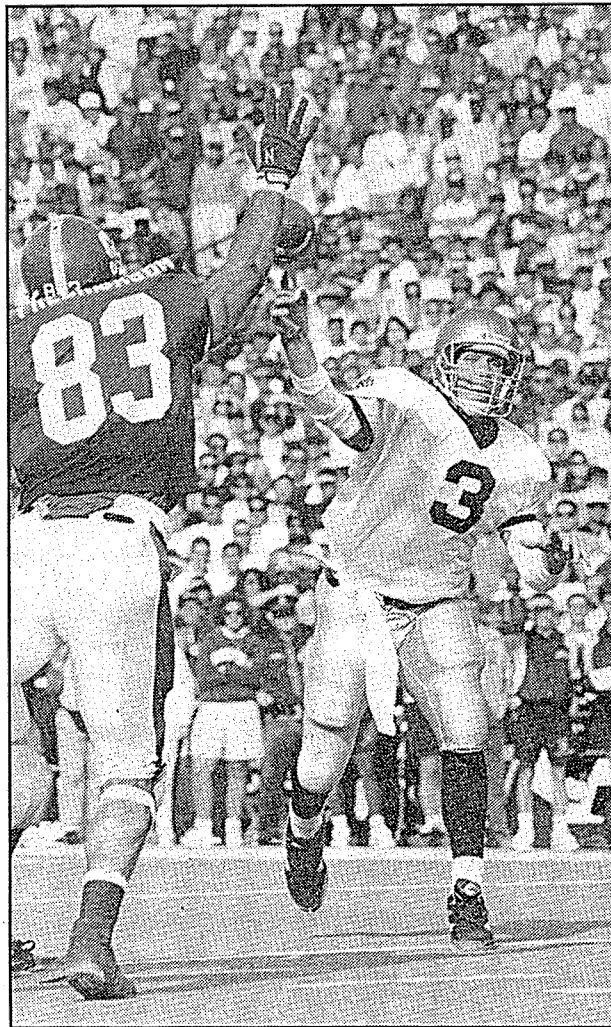
One other exceptional performance on the day came from Lee Becton. Becton had the one early rushing touchdown and a total of 34 yards on 9 carries. However, Becton's biggest play came just after Michigan State scored their first touchdown of the game, late in the second quarter. With just under three minutes to go in the half, Miller hit

Spartan fullback Tony Rollin for a 1-yard touchdown pass. Then, on the ensuing kickoff, Becton caught the ball on the 22-yard line, streaked across the field to the left sideline and blazed 78 yards for a touchdown. This was the first time a Notre Dame player had returned a kickoff for six points since Clint Johnson did it against Hawaii last year. Becton's effort brought the scoring total to 38-10 at the close of the first half.

At the beginning of the second half, the Irish forced Michigan State to punt on its first two possessions, killing any hopes for an early Spartan comeback. On their first series of the half, the Irish defense held Michigan State on a crucial third-and-two, when Germaine Holden hit Scott Green in the backfield for a 1-yard loss.

Irish offense began to sputter for the first time in the game after scoring on their first six possessions; they were forced to punt. The Irish defense again stifled Michigan State's attack. On this Spartan possession of only five plays, John Covington had two tackles and Bryant Young sacked Miller for a 9-yard loss.

On the day, however, the Irish defense did give up 483 yards and allowed Michigan State's star running back Tico Duckett to amass 94 yards



Paul Webb

Rick Mirer launches the Irish air assault.

on 14 carries.

"I don't think we played well defensively. I really don't," said Holtz after the game.

If just the statistics of the contest were looked at, that would appear to be the case. In reality, the Irish second-team defense gave up 21 points and 218 yards late in the third and throughout the fourth quarter. While Michigan State remained with its first team to avoid embarrassment, Duckett amassed 32 of his total yards and a touchdown. In spite of these facts Holtz was no less furious over his team's defensive play.

Michigan State coach George Perles was relieved that Holtz called off his first string defensive dogs and pulled Mirer early in the third quarter. His team was no match for the Irish even if Notre Dame was playing poorly on the other side of the ball.

"The score could have been worse," said Perles. "Lou was a gentleman today. He could have probably tacked on more. They're an outstanding team."

The final two scores by the Irish came in the third quarter. First, Brooks galloped six yards to put the score at 45-10. And then, 3:52 after the Irish stopped Michigan State's next drive, Notre Dame's second-string

quarterback, Kevin McDougal, found freshman phenomenon Derrick Mayes for a 38-yard touchdown pass that Mayes grabbed with grace despite getting only one overextended hand on the ball in the back of the end zone.

After losing to Notre Dame for the sixth time in a row and dropping its second contest in as many years to the lowly Central Michigan Chippewas the week before, the Michigan State players were extremely disheartened by the 52-31 loss. The Spartan offense failed to produce points against the Irish first-team defense, and its own defense was peppered by Mirer's record-setting passing game. Except for the three touch-

downs against the Irish defensivereserves, the game was a disaster for Michigan State from start to finish.

"This kind of embarrassment is not something you want to face week in and week out," lamented Michigan State cornerback Myron Bell. Bell was just one of the defensive backs beaten deep on the first play from scrimmage, Pass 53. □



Paul Webb

Notre Dame sat on Michigan State's Tico Duckett (35) all day, but he still managed to gain 94 yards on the ground.

GAME SUMMARY

Scoring Summary

	1	2	3	4	Final
Notre Dame	21	17	7	7	52
Michigan State	3	7	0	21	31

1st Quarter ND: McBride 4 pass from Mirer (PAT) at 11:45
MS: Del Verne 44 FG at 9:18
ND: Dawson 7 pass from Mirer (PAT) at 6:02
ND: Becton 4 run (PAT) at 1:21

2nd Quarter ND: Griggs 39 pass from Mirer (PAT) at 14:26
ND: Hentrich 26 FG at 6:59
MS: Rollin 1 pass from Miller (PAT) at 2:42
ND: Becton 78 kickoff return (PAT) at 2:28

3rd Quarter ND: Brooks 6 run (PAT) at 6:13

4th Quarter ND: Mayes 38 pass from McDougal (PAT) at 14:55
MS: Thomas 16 run (PAT) at 11:43
MS: Duckett 15 run (PAT) at 7:50
MS: Thomas 3 run (PAT) at 1:06

Team Statistics

	ND	MS
First Downs	22	28
Rushing	10	15
Passing	10	13
Penalty	2	0
Rushing	178	252
Passing	331	231
Total Net Yards	509	483
Average Gain Per Play	6.8	5.8
Fumbles-Lost	2-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	5-40	5-59
Punts-Averages	3-43.7	5-26.65
Kickoff Returns	153	161
3rd Down Conversions	8-14	6-13

Individual Statistics

Rushing: ND- Bettis 14-76, Brooks 10-56-1, Becton 9-34-1, Zellars 3-8, Lozano 2-6, Failla 1-4, Lytle 1-3, McDougal 2-0, Burris 2-(-4), Miller 1-(-5) MS- Thomas 21-146-2, Duckett 14-94-1, Miller 5-12, Goulbourne 1-1, Greene 1-(-1)

Passing: ND- Mirer 25-13-260-3-1, McDougal 2-2-52-1-0, Failla 3-1-19-0-0 MS- Miller 41-23-231-1-2

Receiving: ND- Dawson 5-126, Griggs 3-78, Smith 2-21, McBride 2-18, Mayes 1-38, Johnson 1-23, Jarrell 1-19, Bettis 1-8 MS- Coleman 7-76, MacFarland 4-43, Rollin 4-15, Muhammed 2-34, Martin 2-23, Grabowski 2-16, Greene 1-15, Abrams 1-9