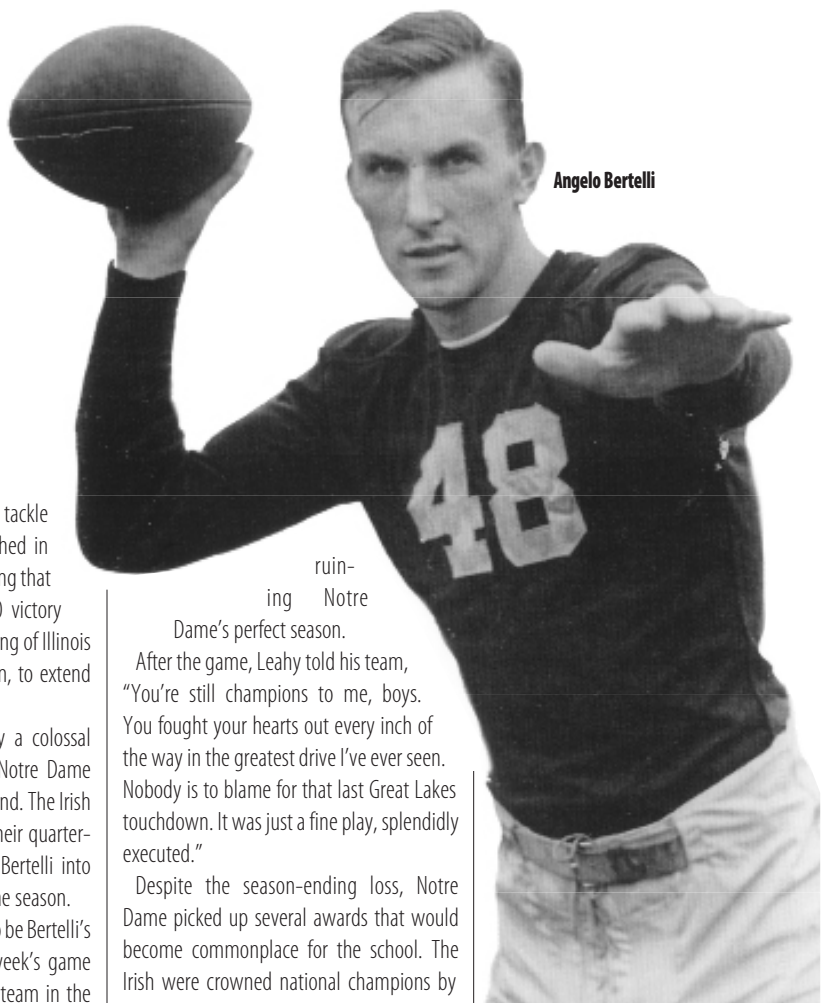


# Irish March to 9-1 Mark and Fourth Consensus National Championship Behind Heisman Winner Angelo Bertelli and Frank Leahy's T-Formation



At the beginning of the 1943 season many experts called Notre Dame's schedule its most difficult in school history. The Irish faced seven teams that season that were ranked among the nation's top 13 teams in the year's final Associated Press Poll.

Frank Leahy's squad only had two returning starters from the '42 squad that finished 7-2-2. To make matters worse, seven of the 10 games in '43 were on the road.

The Irish were still in the early stages of adjusting to the T-formation, which Leahy installed the season before, moving away from the traditional Notre Dame "Box Formation." The new offense enabled the '43 team to score 340 points, 156 more than the season before. The T-formation also led to the emergence of Angelo Bertelli, who moved from tailback to quarterback to lead the Irish offense.

Bertelli led the Irish to a 6-0 start as the team outscored their opponents 261-31. Included in that stretch were key victories over second-ranked Michigan and third-ranked Navy.

A record crowd of 85,688 witnessed the 35-12 Irish win in Ann Arbor. Bertelli was brilliant, completing five of eight passes for two touchdowns while All-America running back Creighton Miller averaged 16 yards per play against Michigan.



Led by Bertelli and All-America tackle Jim White, both of whom finished in the top 10 in the Heisman balloting that year, the Irish rolled to a 50-0 victory over Wisconsin and a 47-0 bashing of Illinois following the win over Michigan, to extend their record to 5-0.

Those wins were followed by a colossal matchup between top-ranked Notre Dame and third-ranked Navy in Cleveland. The Irish cruised to a 33-6 win but lost their quarterback. The Marine Corps called Bertelli into service with four games left in the season.

Leahy called on a sophomore to be Bertelli's replacement in the following week's game against Army, the third-ranked team in the country that week.

All Bertelli's replacement did was throw for two touchdowns, run for another and intercept a pass to lead the Irish to a 26-0 win. A new star was born—the incomparable John Lujack.

With Lujack calling the signals, the Irish defeated two more top ten teams in the following two weeks, Northwestern and Iowa Pre-Flight.

All that stood between Leahy's first undefeated and untied season was Great Lakes, a team the Irish had tied in their two previous meetings during the 1918 and 1942 seasons.

Notre Dame scored first but trailed 12-7 late in the fourth quarter. Miller capped off an 80-yard drive with a touchdown to put the Irish ahead 14-12 with 1:05 to play.

With 33 seconds remaining, Great Lakes quarterback Steve Lach connected on a 46-yard pass to Paul Anderson, who fielded the ball at the six-yard line and then went into the end zone for the game-winning score,

ruining Notre Dame's perfect season. After the game, Leahy told his team, "You're still champions to me, boys. You fought your hearts out every inch of the way in the greatest drive I've ever seen. Nobody is to blame for that last Great Lakes touchdown. It was just a fine play, splendidly executed."

Despite the season-ending loss, Notre Dame picked up several awards that would become commonplace for the school. The Irish were crowned national champions by the Associated Press for the first time ever and Bertelli became the first Notre Dame player to win the Heisman Trophy.

Bertelli easily outdistanced Bob O'Dell of Pennsylvania and Otto Graham of Northwestern for the Heisman.

— Jeff Spelman

## 1943 — 9-1-0

▶ "They had speed, power and deception in their attack, and they looked like one of the best teams I have seen in years."

— Georgia Tech Coach Bill Alexander

▶ "Even the business manager was calling friends and asking if they had an extra ticket. Not even the scalpers had any; you couldn't buy one from them for love nor money for the simple reason that they didn't have any."

— Jim Costin, South Bend Tribune sports editor

▶ "It would be most ungracious for me to say that the 1943 team, which I coach, was better than the 1929 team on which I played. What would my old teammates think of me if I said such a thing? There is honor and glory enough for all Notre Dame teams, winning or losing, and I, for one, refuse to be drawn into any arguments over which was the 'best' Notre Dame team. They are all great in my book. But, it would be unfair for me and most unkind to my present players, however, if I did not give them the credit they so richly deserve."

— Irish head coach Frank Leahy