

Then There Were None — Irish Defeat Top-Ranked, Unbeaten Texas For '77 Title

Who could forget the cover of Sports Illustrated the week after Notre Dame had defeated Texas 38-10 in the 1978 Cotton Bowl? A fierce Terry Eurick was pictured fighting through a hole in the offensive line, the caption reading, "The Irish Wake the Echoes." On the inside, "Shakin' Down the Thunder" was the title of an article about how Notre Dame's victory over the previously-unbeaten Longhorns was enough to vault the Irish from fifth to first in the wire-service polls and give the University its seventh wire service national championship and 10th overall.

The theme for that January 2 in Dallas could have been "and then there were none." For there was not one unbeaten team remaining after the Irish had knocked Texas from its No. 1 ranking.

Third-year Irish coach Dan Devine made sure his charges were ready to take care of America's last undefeated team. An unrelenting defense was the reason why. The defense featured 1976 Outland Trophy winner Ross Browner at one end and Willie Fry at the other, supported by a tough, mobile

group of linebackers headed by All-American Bob Golic. The Irish forced six Texas turnovers in the Cotton Bowl, and an opportunistic offense capitalized on five of them. Notre Dame's devastating strength in the trenches roped up Texas' Heisman Trophy winner Earl Campbell. He managed a tough 116 yards on 29 carries.

Notre Dame's defensive strength came as no surprise in 1977, and it was the primary reason the Irish were near the top of the polls in the preseason rankings. But it was an unexpected boost from the offense that gave Notre Dame the national championship in 1977. Quarterback Joe Montana and running back Jerome Heavens both rebounded on offense, teaming with All-America tight end Ken MacAfee, who led the team in receiving for the third straight year.

The offense came on strong in 1977 as Montana threw for over 1,600 yards and 11 touchdowns and Heavens led the team with 994 rushing yards. Montana earned a reputation as "The Comeback Kid" with performances like the one he had in the third game of the season when, in his first appearance in

over a year, he engineered the Irish to 17 fourth-quarter points in Notre Dame's come-from-behind 31-24 win at Purdue. Later in the season, the Irish traveled to Death Valley to play the 15th-ranked Clemson Tigers, and Montana scored two fourth-quarter touchdowns to bring the Irish to a 21-17 win.

Heavens was healthy again in 1977 and he joined the explosive Vagas Ferguson behind Montana. Heavens proved himself fully recovered with 136 yards against Michigan State and followed his outburst against the Spartans with a Notre Dame-record 200 yards rushing versus Army. Two weeks later he went for 100 against Navy.

But the key regular season win came in a mid-season 49-19 thrashing of fifth-ranked USC in Notre Dame Stadium. In that one, the Irish warmed up in their usual blue jerseys, only to emerge in green just prior to kickoff. That triumph helped wipe out the memory of Notre Dame's second-game road loss, a 20-13 defeat at Ole Miss that proved its sole '77 blemish.

The Irish ran out to a 24-10 halftime lead in the Cotton Bowl and then added touch-



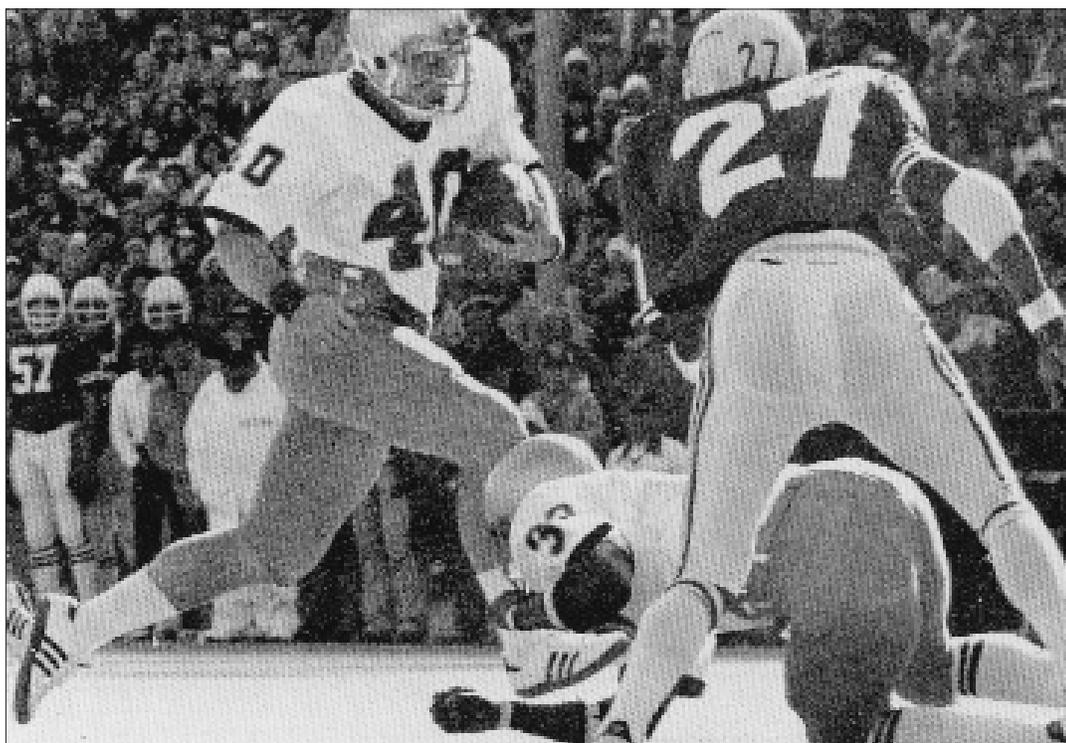
Vagas Ferguson

downs in each of the final quarters for an overwhelming 28-point victory. Few questioned who was number one.

Notre Dame leapfrogged over the four teams ranked ahead of it to grab the nation's top position.

The Irish did, indeed, wake the echoes and shake down the thunder.

— Willie Shearer



Terry Eurick romped for two touchdowns and caught a 12-yard pass to set up a Vagas Ferguson score in the Irish win over top-ranked and previously unbeaten Texas in the '78 Cotton Bowl.

1977 — 11-1-0

► "Pressure comes from within the family. There's no pressure hanging over our heads. We've got this guarded optimism."

— Irish head coach Dan Devine during the preseason

► "You have to remember that defenses are made on the football field, not in the pre-season polls, not in newspaper or magazine articles and not at press conferences."

— Irish captain Willie Fry

► "I don't like to say it was easy, but ... well, the way we played today, we could have dominated any line in the country."

— Irish offensive tackle Tim Foley on the Irish win over Texas

► "We earned it on the field. We played number one and we beat them."

— Irish head coach Dan Devine

► "At least the team that beat us was a good one. Everyone can't say that."

— Texas coach Fred Akers