

The Big Games

A number of games in Notre Dame history have been heralded as among the greatest and most exciting in college football history.

Among the most acclaimed have been Irish bowl wins over Alabama in the '73 Sugar Bowl, Texas in the '78 Cotton Bowl, Houston in the '79 Cotton Bowl, West Virginia in the '89 Fiesta Bowl and Colorado in the '90 Orange Bowl. The wins over Alabama, Texas and West Virginia (all over unbeaten opponents) clinched national championships for Notre Dame. The triumph over Houston has been called the most incredible comeback in Notre Dame history, while the Colorado contest marked the latest in a series against top-ranked and unbeaten bowl opponents.

There are many more games—such as the 1993 win over top-ranked Florida State, the 29-27 win over Michigan in '80 on Harry Oliver's 51-yard field goal as time ran out—that have featured fantastic finishes and others—like the '88 triumph over Miami—that have broken lengthy winning streaks by Irish opponents. Here are details of some of the most memorable games in Notre Dame's record books:

Notre Dame 35, Army 13 November 1, 1913

When Army reluctantly agreed to pay Notre Dame \$1,000 for its long journey to the plains of West Point, the good-but stingy-generals conceded the hefty sum would be worth a victory.

Although the Cadets knew coach Jesse Harper's Irish were a Midwestern powerhouse (they'd lost just one game the previous three seasons), most Army fans felt Notre Dame would serve merely as a tasty appetizer for the West Pointers' annual picnic with Navy. The Irish might be able to give Army a run for its money, but surely the Cadets' gridiron superiority would crush the Hoosier hayseeds who had arrived from their all-day train trip with 18 players — and just 14 pairs of cleats.

Army, which had scouted Notre Dame's 62-0 thrashing of Alma, was expecting a hard-hitting, powerful running attack, led by a strong line. Instead, the Cadets found themselves in the middle of an unrelenting blitzkrieg.

Notre Dame got off to a rocky start. After winning the coin toss and electing to receive (a bold move in those days), quarterback Gus Dorais fumbled during the opening series, and Army recovered on the Irish 27-yard line. But the potent Cadet offense gained just one yard on three tries, and the Army began to realize that \$1,000 was a steep price tag for humiliation.

"After we had stood terrific pounding by the Army line, and a trio of backs that charged in like locomotives, we held them on downs," said Knute Rockne, then a senior end. "Dorais, in a huddle said, 'Let's open up.' It was amusing to see the Army boys huddle after a first, snappy 11-yard pass had been completed for a first down. Their guards and tackles went tumbling into us to stop line bucks and plunges. Instead, Dorais stepped neatly back and flipped the ball to an uncovered end or halfback. This we did on a march up the field, gaining three first downs in almost as many minutes."

Notre Dame's surprising passing game helped the visitors stake claim to a 14-13 lead at halftime. The Cadets certainly weren't strangers to the aerial toss; in fact, Army was the premier passing team of the East. But the Cadets, along with the rest of the football world, thought passes were thrown only in desperation — as a last resort. The West Pointers couldn't adjust to a team using the pass as its bread and butter.

So the Irish offense continued to shoot rockets in the second half, and Army, with a young cadet named Dwight Eisenhower sitting on the bench, failed miserably on defense.

When Dorais wasn't hurling spirals to Rockne (a technique the pair had mastered during the summer when they worked as lifeguards at the beach resort of Cedar Point, Ohio), Ray Eichenlaub would break through the line for a long gain. Even the Army partisans ooohed and aahed at Notre Dame's amazing versatility.

By game's end, Dorais had completed 14 of 17 passes (he misfired on his first two tries) for 243 yards — unheard of — of totals in 1913. And his 40-yard toss to Rockne was the longest pass ever completed to that day. Notre Dame had rocked the football world with its stunning 35-13 victory.

The win revolutionized college football as the forward pass, a legal weapon since 1906, gained popularity as a legitimate offensive tool.

"The press and the football public hailed this new game, and Notre Dame received credit as the originator of a style of play that we simply systematized," said Rockne.

Notre Dame also earned a national reputation with its victory, and teams from all over the East were clamoring for a matchup. Notre Dame had made it to the big top.

Notre Dame 12, Army 6 November 10, 1928

Knute Rockne was desperate.

His 1928 team, decimated by injuries, already had lost two of its first six games. Three powerful teams — Army, Carnegie Tech and Southern California — loomed on the schedule before the season (the worst in Rockne's illustrious coaching career) would mercifully draw to a close.

Rockne knew that if his Ramblers could upend Army — winner of six straight games — in Yankee Stadium, a losing record could be averted. His critics were claiming he'd lost his touch; the magic was gone. But Rockne knew better. The week of the game he quietly told

his neighbor that Notre Dame would beat Army. Rockne had a plan. His team might not be able to win on talent, but Notre Dame would win on emotion and spirit. Rockne would deliver what would later become the most famous pep talk in sports history.

After pregame warm-ups, Rockne huddled his players in the locker room. They laid down on World War I blankets that covered the cold, clammy floor. Rockne waited until the room was silent. He lowered his head before speaking.

He began slowly — telling the team about George Gipp, a Notre Dame player who had died during his senior season eight years ago. Although none of the players had known Gipp personally, each and every one of them had heard of his exploits. They knew Gipp had been the greatest player of his time.

Rockne, who had been at Gipp's bedside, repeated the young athlete's last wish.

"I've got to go, Rock. It's all right. I'm not afraid. Sometime, Rock, when the team is up against it, when things are wrong and the breaks are beating the boys — tell them to go in there with all they've got and win just one for the Gipper. I don't know where I'll be then, Rock. But I'll know about it, and I'll be happy."

Rockne continued.

"The day before he died George Gipp asked me to wait until the situation seemed hopeless — then ask a Notre Dame team to go out and beat Army for him. This is the day, and you are the team."

"There was no one in the room that wasn't crying," recalled line coach Ed Healey. "There was a moment of silence, and then all of a sudden those players ran out of the dressing room and almost tore the hinges off the door. They were all ready to kill someone."

Army didn't have a chance.

After falling behind 6-0 in the third period, Notre Dame scored two touchdowns and held off a last-chance rally by the Cadets for a 12-6 win.

Jack Chevigny tied the score at 6-6 with a one-yard plunge. As he picked himself up in the end zone, he jumped up and shouted, "That's one for the Gipper."

The emotional Chevigny was helping Notre Dame drive toward its final and winning score in the last quarter when he was injured. Rockne was forced to take him out and replace Chevigny with Bill Drew. Reserve Johnny O'Brien, a willowy hurdler for the track team, took Johnny Colrick's place at left end.

The Irish were 32 yards from the goal line. Left halfback Butch Niemiec took the ball, looked downfield to O'Brien and flung a wobbly pass over an Army defender. O'Brien hauled the ball in on the 10-yard line, squeezed past two tacklers and dove into the end zone for the winning touchdown. O'Brien never became a starter in his career with Notre Dame, but "One-Play" was a legitimate hero to Irish fans.

As O'Brien scored, the Notre Dame bench erupted in whoops and hollers. The injured Chevigny cried on the sidelines, "That's one for the Gipper, too."

Even Rockne showed his satisfaction with the play.

"You could see a great, big smile on his face," said quarterback Frank Carideo. "He was happy when things created during the week were used to perfection in the ballgame."

But O'Brien's touchdown didn't put the game safely away. Army had another chance with less than two minutes to go. The Cadets drove methodically through the Notre Dame defense, helped by a 55-yard kickoff return by All-American Chris Cagle. Cagle, who had played all of the game, collapsed at the 10-yard line because of exhaustion and had to be carried from the field. Dick Hutchinson took the ball to the four and then to the one. But time ran out before the Cadets could get off another play, and Notre Dame had indeed "won one for the Gipper."

Notre Dame 18, Ohio State 13 November 2, 1935

More than 60 years have passed since Notre Dame's unbelievable 18-13 upset of Ohio State, but the 1935 confrontation is still labeled "The Game of the Century."

Although both teams were undefeated heading into the clash, the top-ranked Buckeyes were heavy favorites. One sportswriter picked Ohio State by 40 points since coach Francis "Close the Gates of Mercy" Schmidt had his Bucks riding rampant over every foe. The Irish, good but not that good, weren't given much of a chance.

But coach Elmer Layden, a former member of the Four Horsemen, said, "The 1935 team was one that believed in itself to an extraordinary extent. It was fired emotionally because death walked with it in every game."

Captain-elect Joe Sullivan, a starting tackle, had died of pneumonia several months before the season began. His teammates didn't elect another captain. Instead, they dedicated each contest to Sullivan.

Electricity had been generating in Columbus for weeks before the big game. There were parades and pep rallies. University officials and city politicians went into hiding to avoid "friends" seeking tickets. Scalpers were scoffing at any offer less than \$50.

On the Friday before the game, Layden took his team to a secluded seminary outside the city for workouts, hoping to avoid the carnival-like atmosphere on campus. But when the Irish arrived, they were greeted by thousands of Buckeye fans shouting, "Catholics, go home."

When Saturday came, over 81,000 fans jammed into Ohio Stadium. The Buckeyes got off to a quick start and owned a commanding 13-0 lead at halftime. The pregame predictions were coming true. Ohio State's offense operated at will, and Notre Dame couldn't do anything right.

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"I had never seen a Notre Dame offense so completely stopped," said writer Francis Wallace. "When the Irish passed, the ball was intercepted and converted into a touchdown. It was difficult to get a running play started against the hard-charging Ohio State line. It was even hard to get a punt away."

In the dressing room, Layden announced that the second team would start the second half. He ended his analytical pep talk by saying, "They won the first half. Now it's your turn. Go out and win this half for yourselves."

The defense finally figured out how to stop Ohio State's razzle-dazzle, and the offense, behind the superb antics of Andy Pilney, got on track. At the end of the third quarter, Ohio State still was ahead 13-0, but the Irish were driving. Notre Dame was on the Buckeyes' 12-yard line.

Pilney passed to Francis Gaul at the two-yard line. On the next play, Steve Miller went over for the touchdown. The conversion attempt hit the crossbar and wobbled back onto the field, but Notre Dame had cracked the scoreboard.

The Irish were threatening again, but Miller fumbled in the end zone and Ohio State recovered. Notre Dame's hopes dimmed as the Bucks moved downfield. But the defense finally forced Ohio State to punt, and Notre Dame was back in the business of creating miracles.

With three minutes to go, the Irish started from their own 20-yard line. Pilney's zig-zag running brought the Irish quickly into Ohio State territory. Then he tossed a 33-yard touchdown pass to Mike Layden. A kick would tie the game. But the Irish missed again, and the Buckeyes clung to a 13-12 advantage.

Layden called for an onside kick, but Ohio State wasn't fooled and recovered the ball. All the Buckeyes had to do was maintain possession for a win. But on Dick Beltz' drive off right tackle, he was hit hard by Pilney and lost the football. Notre Dame's second-string center Henry Pojman recovered on the Ohio State 49.

The crowd was out of control. Layden was crouching on the sidelines, chain-smoking. He sent in a play. The ball came back to Pilney, who dropped back to throw. But all his receivers were covered. He took off, swerving to avoid a rush of Buckeye defenders. They finally forced him out of bounds on the Ohio State 19-yard line. But Pilney didn't get up. He had torn cartilage in his knee and had to be carried from the field on a stretcher.

Bill Shakespeare entered the game with half a minute remaining. He threw straight at Buckeye defender Beltz, who had his hands on the ball, but couldn't hang on.

Layden sent in scrub quarterback Jim McKenna with another play. McKenna had sneaked aboard the team train to Columbus, and his teammates had helped hide him in a berth. When he couldn't scrounge up a ticket for the game, he talked his way into the Notre Dame locker room. When Layden saw him, he ordered the industrious youth to get dressed. He did, but in his excitement he forgot his pads. Now he was bringing in the winning play.

Shakespeare threw another pass. Wayne Millner caught the ball in the end zone. The miracle was almost complete.

"I've thought a lot about the pass. But I wake up nights dreaming about the one before it—the one the Ohio State guy had in his hands and dropped," said Shakespeare years after the game. "If he'd held it, Wayne and I both would have been bums."

Pilney, the game's hero, missed the touchdown. He was being carried to the locker room.

"While they were carrying me toward the dressing room door, I was trying to turn my head, even though I was in intense pain, to see what was happening," he remembered. "I heard the crowd and the trainer says to me, 'Andy, it's over. We won.' That's the last thing I remember. Then I went out."

Notre Dame 0, Army 0 November 9, 1946

Once again Notre Dame found itself in the middle of a classic confrontation. Old rivals Army and Notre Dame were scheduled to meet in New York City's Yankee Stadium. Although the Cadets had won 25 straight and appeared headed for their third straight national championship, World War II was over, Frank Leahy was back from the Navy and many former Irish players were trading in their military uniforms for football jerseys.

The Army-Notre Dame game would be the game of the year. Yankee Stadium had been sold out since June even though tickets didn't go on sale publicly until August 1. Over \$500,000 in refund checks were issued to disappointed fans. Requests for press credentials reached record levels, and many lucky ticket holders were blatantly scalping them for \$200.

While Leahy was serving in the Navy, Notre Dame had been whitewashed twice by the Cadets—59-0 in 1944 and 48-0 in 1945. Leahy had listened to those games overseas, and now that he was back, he was determined to change things.

His Irish methodically pounded their first five opponents into the ground, setting the stage for a battle of the unbeaten in Yankee Stadium. The week before the game, his squad would take periodical breaks during practice to chant, "Fifty-nine and forty-eight, this is the year we retaliate." Notre Dame students sent daily postcards to Army coach Earl "Red" Blaik. All were signed "SPATNC" — Society for the Prevention of Army's Third National Championship.

But the game of the year failed to answer any questions about supremacy in the college football world. The brutal, hard-fought struggle ended in a disappointing and frustrating 0-0 tie.

"I suppose I should be elated over the tie," mused Leahy after the game. "After all, we didn't lose, but I'm not."

Blaik echoed his thoughts.

"There is no jubilation in this dressing room. It was a vigorously-fought, terrific defensive game. Both teams played beautifully on the defense and that affected both teams' attacks."

Neither squad mustered much of a scoring threat all afternoon. Notre Dame drove all the way to the Army four-yard line in the second quarter, but the Black Knights stopped the Irish on downs. Notre Dame had moved the ball mostly by running down the right side. When the Irish got the ball to the Navy four-yard line, the Irish ran two quarterback sneaks. Following those attempts, the Irish ran two plays to the left, but failed to score.

Notre Dame's defense contained Army's touchdown twins — Doc Blanchard and Glenn Davis — who were often caught behind the line of scrimmage.

But Blanchard, frustrated by an Irish line that refused to budge, made a last ditch effort to score, and he almost succeeded. Army crossed into Notre Dame territory for the first and only time all day as Blanchard, "Mr. Inside," broke around the end, cut for the sideline and had a clear path to the end zone. Only one man was in a position to try and stop him. As 74,000 fans leaped to their feet, Johnny Lujack sped across the field, closed in on his prey and dove for Blanchard's ankles. The All-American was dragged down on the Notre Dame 37-yard line.

"They said Blanchard couldn't be stopped one-on-one in the open field, yet I did it," said an exhausted Lujack after the game. "I really can't understand all the fuss. I simply pinned him against the sideline and dropped him with a routine tackle."

Army then moved the ball to the Notre Dame 12-yard line and Davis threw an option pass, which was intercepted by future Irish head coach Terry Brennan at the eight-yard line. One play later, Brennan ran the ball past the Irish 30 and Notre Dame was out of trouble.

Even the statistics couldn't pinpoint a clear-cut winner. Notre Dame had 10 first downs to Army's nine; the Cadets gained 224 yards, while Notre Dame managed 219. Each team had 52 yards passing and 40 yards punting. Army completed four of 16 passes; the Irish were five of 17.

Notre Dame 27, Oklahoma 21 November 8, 1952

The first meeting of the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame and the Oklahoma Sooners sold out Notre Dame Stadium's 60,000 seats weeks before kickoff. A total of 10,000 fans made the journey to South Bend, including 2,500 who came by special trains. The much anticipated clash pitted Notre Dame, the dominant force in college football for nearly half a century, against an Oklahoma team which had posted the best record in the nation over the past five years.

Oklahoma entered the game as a heavy favorite, hailing a 13-game unbeaten streak and boasting an average of 42 points per contest. The game featured two of the best backfields in college football history. Oklahoma's Eddie Crowder, Billy Vessels, Buddy Leake, and Buck McPhail comprised one of the most well-balanced and versatile units the game had ever seen.

"Beyond a doubt, Oklahoma had the best offensive platoon of the season and as far as I know the best ever," wrote veteran Minnesota sportswriter Dick Callum.

Although perhaps less experienced, the Irish backfield of Ralph Gugliemi, Tom Carey, John Lattner, Joe Heap, and Neil Worden was no less talented.

Oklahoma opened the scoring in the first period as Eddie Crowder hit Vessels with a 27-yard touchdown pass. Notre Dame answered back in the second quarter with a bruising drive capped by Gugliemi's touchdown pass to Heap. Shortly afterward, it was Vessels again for Oklahoma who broke through the Notre Dame line and danced 62 yards for a touchdown. After a wild opening half that saw 10 turnovers, the Sooners took a seven-point lead into the lockerroom.

Notre Dame took its opening drive all the way to the Oklahoma seven-yard line, but Lattner fumbled the ball away to Oklahoma. He redeemed himself on defense, however, snaring an Oklahoma pass at the 30 and taking it all the way down to the Oklahoma seven-yard line. Worden tied the game at 14-14 with a one-yard burst into the endzone. Not to be outdone, Vessels and the Sooners answered back on their next possession with a 44-yard touchdown romp down the sidelines. Notre Dame answered right back with a long drive that featured Worden carrying eight consecutive times to punch the ball into the endzone.

On the ensuing kickoff, Notre Dame's Dan Shannon hit Oklahoma's Larry Grigg with a mammoth tackle, knocking both players unconscious and jarring loose the football. Irish reserve Al Kohanowich made the biggest play of his career, pouncing on the ball at the Oklahoma 25. Notre Dame drove down to the one and Tom Carey smashed through for the touchdown. The game was not over yet, however, as Oklahoma's Carl Allison blocked the extra point, leaving the score 27-21. Over 13 minutes remained on the clock and Oklahoma's high-powered offense needed only seven points to take back the lead.

On the next drive, Oklahoma went down to the Irish 29 where Crowder narrowly missed Max Boydston with a touchdown pass, but the Irish held strong. On its next drive, Oklahoma busted down to the ND 25, but turned the ball over. The Sooners got the ball back in time for one more desperate try. With 40 seconds to play, Larry Grigg raced back down to the ND 25. Vessels tried two passes for the endzone, but neither found the mark. When the clock ran out, Notre Dame was victorious, 27-21.

Jack Closser of the Cleveland press called this game, "a duel between a bulldog and a wolfhound."

He went on to remark that, "In my 30 years of covering football, [I have] never seen a more inspiring performance."

"We are naturally extremely gratified and thrilled," commented Irish coach Frank Leahy, "Most of all it was a wonderful lesson for our lads. It proved to them that if you want some-

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thing bad enough, and if you are willing to dig in and work for it, almost any objective is possible. Oklahoma is a fine team and very well-coached by Bud Wilkinson. That Vessels boy is one of the best runners we've ever seen."

Vessels, who went on to win the Heisman Trophy that year, ran for nearly 200 yards and scored all three Sooner touchdowns. In a moment that truly captures the meaning of college football, Vessels left the field arm and arm with his successor as Heisman Trophy winner in Latner, as jubilant Notre Dame students leaped onto the field in celebration.

Notre Dame 7, Oklahoma 0 November 16, 1957

The odds were stacked heavily against the Irish.

The Sooners, defending national champions and number-two in the weekly polls, boasted the country's longest winning streak at 47 games. Oklahoma had not lost since the 1953 home opener when Notre Dame ruined the Sooners' season debut, 28-21.

Powerful Oklahoma, which had blasted the Irish 40-0 the year before in South Bend, had scored in 123 consecutive contests and was averaging 300 yards a game. The Sooners, playing in their own massive stadium, were favored by at least 19 points.

Notre Dame, which suffered through its first losing season in 24 years in 1956, had dropped two straight to Navy and Michigan State (the Irish were outscored 54-12 in those two contests). Coach Terry Brennan was under fire.

Although the Sooners moved all the way down to the Irish 13-yard line on their first possession, the Notre Dame defense dug in and held. Oklahoma would get no closer the rest of the afternoon.

Both teams threatened with several offensive drives, but strong defensive stands keep the score at a standstill until late in the fourth quarter.

"I was willing to settle for a scoreless tie in the third quarter," admitted Oklahoma coach Bud Wilkinson. "I felt at the start of the second half we had a good chance. But after we couldn't get going, even with our tremendous punting to their goal, I was ready to settle for a scoreless tie."

The Irish, however, had other plans. With 3:50 left in the game, Notre Dame needed three yards on fourth down to cross the goal line. Quarterback Bob Williams, who had executed nearly every play perfectly all afternoon, faked to Nick Pietrosante in the middle and then pitched to halfback Dick Lynch. Lynch went wide around right end for the touchdown, Monty Stickles kicked the extra point, and Notre Dame had its 7-0 upset.

Williams, who engineered the 80-yard drive in 20 plays, explained, "They were in tight, real tight, just waiting for me to give the ball to Pietrosante. Well, I just faked to him and tossed out to Lynch and it worked like a charm."

Brennan, who often called the victory the "greatest thrill of my athletic career," credited the defense with the win.

"We prepared for them in detail," he admitted. "We didn't have a whole lot of speed and we tried to be as basic as possible. There were only four or five basic plays — and if you stopped them you had a chance to win. The big thing was to stop their running game."

The Irish indeed halted the Sooners' ground attack. Oklahoma managed 98 yards rushing. When the team arrived back in South Bend after the victory, the Irish were met by over 5,000 fans. That hearty welcome was richly deserved as Oklahoma's 47-game winning skein still remains the longest in college football.

Notre Dame 10, Michigan State 10 November 19, 1966

When the brutal battle in East Lansing was finally over, there was nothing left but insoluble emptiness and frustration.

The epic battle between number-one-ranked Notre Dame and number-two Michigan State didn't settle much of anything for either team. When the clock ticked its last second-hand sweep, exhausted and battered players, emotionally-droughted coaches and frenzied fans could only look at the 10-10 tie in exasperation and disappointment.

"Nobody can be happy with a tie," said Irish quarterback Terry Hanratty who had to leave the game in the first quarter after Bubba Smith rearranged his shoulder. "It was a helluva ballgame, but we were all so tired. I don't think anyone wanted to go into a fifth quarter."

The Irish, who had rallied from a 10-0 deficit early in the second quarter, had a chance to go for the win. Notre Dame had the ball on its 30-yard line with time for at least four passing plays. The Spartans were expecting the Irish to go for broke. But under coach Ara Parseghian's strict orders, the Irish played it safe.

"We'd fought hard to come back and tie it up," he explained. "After all that, I didn't want to risk giving it to them cheap. They get reckless and it could cost them the game. I wasn't going to do a jackass thing like that at this point."

His players agreed.

"It was the worst kind of depression coming off the field after working that hard and coming out with a tie," remembered pass-catching sensation Jim Seymour, who had a particularly disappointing day by dropping the only pass that ever came near him. "What people don't realize is that we couldn't throw the ball because they had set up a specific defense to stop the pass. Our quarterback was so run down because of his diabetic problem that he couldn't throw the ball more than 10 yards. And they were really set for it. So why throw the ball for an interception and really hang yourself? Ara's been questioned many times about

that decision. . . . But there was nothing else he could do under the circumstances."

Seymour was right. The Irish probably were lucky to survive with a tie. Their best halfback, Nick Eddy, had slipped getting off the train in East Lansing and fell on an already banged-up shoulder. He wouldn't even get in the game. Center George Goeddeke's ankle fell victim to Bubba Smith in the first quarter, along with Hanratty.

But Coley O'Brien, who required two insulin shots a day to keep his diabetes in check, and sophomore Bob Gladieux proved able replacements.

After the Spartans had taken a 10-0 lead on Regis Cavender's four-yard run and Dick Kenney's 47-yard field goal, O'Brien directed the Irish 54 yards in four plays. He hit Gladieux with an 11-yard strike and Rocky Bleier for a nine-yard gain. O'Brien then lofted a perfect 34-yard spiral to Gladieux, who caught it on the goal line and stepped into the end zone.

The Irish finally caught up with the Spartans on the first play of the fourth quarter. After Notre Dame stalled on the Michigan State 10-yard line, Joe Azzaro kicked a 28-yard field goal to knot the score.

Notre Dame was dominating the second half, and the defense hadn't let the Spartans any closer than they were when they had kicked the field goal. Linebackers Jim Lynch and Jim Horney nailed the talented Spartan runners for either minus yardage or no yardage on 16 rushing plays.

With five minutes left in the game, the Irish got a big break — the kind that decides ball-games. Safety Tom Schoen intercepted a wild Jimmy Raye pass and ran it back to the Spartan 18-yard line. Larry Conjar went straight ahead for two yards. But on the second play, halfback Dave Haley went wide to his left. Phil Hoag and Bubba Smith nailed him for an eight-yard loss. O'Brien's third down pass wobbled incomplete, and Notre Dame had to settle for a 42-yard field goal try. Azzaro's kick went wide to the right.

Notre Dame 31, Miami 30 October 15, 1988

The edge of the seats in Notre Dame Stadium may be worn thin, but the Stadium's magic is alive and well.

And so is Notre Dame's football program.

When Pat Terrell batted away Steve Walsh's two-point conversion pass with 45 seconds to play, the Irish locked up a stunning 31-30 upset of No. 1-ranked Miami.

Erased was Miami's mystique and all the embarrassment it has handed the Irish in recent years.

Walsh had his most prolific day and was saddled with his first loss in 17 college starts. The Miami regular-season winning streak is over at 36 games and its road win streak is ended at 20.

Notre Dame had lost the last four emotional encounters by an embarrassing 133-20 margin and made it seem like ancient history with the one-point triumph.

Both clubs made mistakes and caused mistakes. Notre Dame made the big play that counted.

Its defense was on the spot in the final two minutes.

The Irish led 31-24 when Tony Rice was hit hard to force a fumble on third-and-17 from the 21. The Hurricanes' Greg Mark recovered and the Irish were in trouble.

Miami got four yards in three plays, then faced a fourth-and-six from the 11. Walsh, who completed 31 of 50 for 424 yards, four TDs and three interceptions, lofted a pass to the right front corner of the end zone and Andre Brown made a lunging reception for the touchdown.

Miami coach Jimmy Johnson said there was never any doubt about the choice of going for the two-point conversion.

Walsh dropped back and had time. But as he started to get pressure from tackle George Williams, he lofted the pass toward tailback Leonard Conley in the end zone. Terrell, in man-to-man coverage, had him blanketed and stepped in front to knock it away.

Miami went with an onside-kick attempt — it had won at Michigan, 31-30, after recovering an onside kick — but Anthony Johnson smothered it at the Miami 44. All Notre Dame had to do was ride out 42 seconds to sign another chapter to its glorious history.

The Irish couldn't stop Miami unless it took the ball away. It did seven times — three on interceptions and four on fumble recoveries. The Irish gave it back three times.

The most controversial Miami miscue came with seven minutes to go. On fourth-and-seven at the Irish 11, Walsh hit Cleveland Gary with a short pass. Strong safety George Streeter hit Gary near the end zone and the ball popped loose at the one. Mike Stonebreaker recovered.

Notre Dame, shuffling in eight offensive linemen because of injuries, drew first blood with a 75-yard, 12-play drive capped by Rice's seven-yard run.

Walsh answered early in the second quarter when he drove the Hurricanes 68 yards in eight plays. Brown caught the eight-yard TD pass for a 7-7 tie.

Notre Dame got a couple in the second quarter. Rice hooked up with Raghib Ismail on a 57-yard pass on third and 13 from the Irish 17 then finished off the 80-yard drive with a 9-yard scoring toss to Braxton Banks.

Less than two minutes later, Terrell stepped in front of a Walsh pass that was tipped by defensive end Frank Stams and returned it 60 yards for the score. Reggie Ho's third PAT gave the Irish a 21-7 lead.

Walsh only needed five minutes to erase it, ending one drive with a 23-yard TD pass to Conley on fourth and five, and the other on a 15-yard pass to Gary.

The Irish could have felt good about the halftime tie had it not been the ease with which

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Miami punched in its second and third touchdowns.

They started over at half and it got crazier.

Rice was intercepted by Bubba McDowell at the Miami 42. But on first down, Conley was hammered by Jeff Alm and Stams recovered the fumble.

The Irish got into field-goal range, but Bill Hackett's 43-yard attempt was blocked.

The Irish defense held. On fourth-and-three at the 47, Miami tried a fake punt and failed. Reserve quarterback Steve Belles made the stop on upback Matt Britton.

From the 46, the Irish took two plays to get in. Rice and Ricky Watters hooked up on a 44-yard pass play and Pat Eilers went the final two yards.

Miami drove again to the Irish 25 when 6-foot-6 defensive lineman Alm picked off a Walsh pass two yards off the line.

The Irish took the momentum and marched, 65 yards in nine plays before stalling at the 11. Ho hit the 27-yarder to give the Irish their 31-21 lead.

Miami made good on its first possession of the final quarter when Carlos Huerta hit a 23-yard field goal to close the gap to 31-24.

Notre Dame 31, Florida State 24 November 13, 1993

This was one matchup where the game lived up to the pregame hype, maybe even beat it. Notre Dame and Florida State entered this "Game of the Century" with undefeated records, identical 16-game winning streaks and the top two rankings in the Associated Press poll as the Seminoles held the top spot.

The buildup for this game was an all-time high, thanks in part to the two teams entering the game undefeated and thanks in part to the ever expanding electronic and print media. As each week during the college football season went by, and as the Fighting Irish and Seminoles both remained unblemished, it became clear that Nov. 13 was not going to be just another football game at Notre Dame Stadium.

National media began rolling in for this event on Monday and by the time kickoff came on Saturday, there were over 700 media credentials issued. Personalities from television talk show host Regis Philbin to movie producer Spike Lee converged on Notre Dame Stadium, as did athletes like baseball's Roger Clemens and golf's Paul Azinger. On Friday night, the Joyce Athletic and Convocation Center was jam-packed for a pep rally two hours before it was scheduled to start.

And through all the hype, all the glitter, all the celebrities, the most exciting part of the whole week was undoubtedly clear — the actual 60 minutes of football played on the Notre Dame Stadium turf.

"I thought with all the hype, the game might not live up to it," said Notre Dame head coach Lou Holtz. "I don't know how it looked from the press box and I don't know how it looked from the stands. But I want to tell you I wouldn't want it any more exciting from the sidelines. I can promise you that."

After controlling and leading most of the game, it all came down — as if the football gods wanted to put a spike in the heart of the hype once and for all — to the final play before the Irish won 31-24.

With three seconds left to play Florida State quarterback and eventual Heisman Trophy winner Charlie Ward had one last chance. The previous series, on a fourth and goal from the 20, he had found a miracle by hitting Kez McCorvey for a touchdown pass that had bounced off the hands of Notre Dame safety Brian Magee to cut the lead to seven with 1:39 left to play.

After a three-and-out series for the Irish, Florida State got the ball back with 51 seconds, no timeouts, and the ball at its own 37. Three plays and 41 seconds later, the Seminoles were at the Irish 14 and Ward's first try for the touchdown was batted down by defensive end Thomas Knight.

That left three seconds and one play. "I was scared a little bit there," said Irish quarterback Kevin McDougal. "You can have no control when you're on the sidelines and with Charlie Ward on the field, anything can happen."

"I had watched the drive where they got the touchdown before so I said I'll switch up and not watch it. I just watched the clock and on the last play I waited for the crowd reaction."

He liked what he heard because here's what everyone else in Notre Dame Stadium saw. Ward went back, got some pressure from the Irish defensive line, scrambled and fired for the end zone toward Kevin Knox. Notre Dame cornerback Shawn Wooden, inserted as a sixth defensive back, batted the pass down and bedlam followed.

Amid jubilant fans who swarmed the field, linebacker Pete Bercich fell to his knees in thanks and Wooden raised his hand in the No. 1 salute and shouted: "How's it feel! How's it feel!"

"We had to throw the ball in the end zone," said Ward. "I missed my guy who was wide open (Matt Frier at the five), but that's part of making the decision and the ball was batted down. I can't go back and rethink what I did."

Said Wooden: "Coach Holtz just told us to stay fundamentally sound, read your keys. Charlie came to my side. I looked at No. 1, he did a square-in, so I just stayed underneath. When Ward was scrambling, I just tried to stay under No. 1. I was staying there, no matter what. The pass was right to me. I was surprised."

"I just wanted to knock it down and make sure."

Florida State scored on its first possession and then was chasing from behind for the rest of the afternoon. The Irish came right back with an 80-yard drive, capped by a 32-yard romp on a reverse by Adrian Jarrell behind the escort of linemen Aaron Taylor, Ryan Leahy and Todd Norman downfield.

A 26-yard touchdown run by Lee Becton keyed the second Irish drive and three minutes later, the Irish cashed in on John Covington's interception. Coupled with a personal foul on FSU, Notre Dame took over on the Seminoles 23, and a third down pass to Michael Miller from McDougal set up a six-yard TD run by Jeff Burris. Entering the game, the Seminoles had given up just two rushing TDs the entire season.

"I've got no excuses about the game. Notre Dame won the game. I thought they deserved to win the game," said Florida State head coach Bobby Bowden. "They did the things to us I was afraid they were going to do to us. And there's no doubt about the great spirit they have here. I think it helps them. I do not think it hurt us. Their kids just played possessed."

By halftime it was 21-7 Irish, marking the first time in 23 games that the Seminoles had been behind at the half. Ward had been picked off for just the second time in the season, breaking a streak of 159 passes without an interception. It didn't get any better for the Seminoles in the third quarter, as the Irish received a 47-yard field goal from Kevin Pendergast.

But Ward, who was 31 of 50 for 297 yards and three touchdowns, led FSU back with an 80-yard scoring drive, concluded with a six-yard pass to Warrick Dunn. Scott Bentley made a 24-yard field goal with 10:40 left to play for a 24-17 score.

McDougal then went to work through the air. Becton made a one-handed catch on a screen that was good for 15 yards and on third down McDougal double-clutched and stepped under a heavy blitz to find Lake Dawson for a first down, setting up Burris' second touchdown of the day.

"Just when it looked like we were going to give them a knockout, they came right back and then it looked like we were on the ropes and we put on a 80-yard drive against the wind," said Holtz.

Becton led all rushers in the game with 122 yards while McDougal was nine of 18 in the air for the Irish for 108 yards.