

## Gold, Blue (and Green)

Although Notre Dame's official colors for athletics long have been listed as gold and blue, the color of the Irish home football jersey has switched back and forth between blue and green for more than 50 years.

The origin of school colors can be traced back to the founding of the University. At the time of its founding in 1842, Notre Dame's original school colors were yellow and blue; yellow symbolized the light and blue the truth. However, sometime after the Dome and Statue of Mary atop the Main Building was gilded, gold and blue became the official colors of the University.

Notre Dame made moderate adjustments on its uniforms for the 2001 season as adidas took over the design of the uniforms, adding a panel of gold down the sides of the white road jerseys with a single shamrock and the word "Irish" at the V of the neckline. A single green shamrock with an interlocking ND was also added to the traditional gold pants, while the football helmet remained the same.

Further adjustments occurred for the 2004 season as the uniform featured slimmer numbers on jerseys while removing the gold panel on the sides of the white road jerseys.

Before the adidas-era uniform change in 2001, the 1984 season marked the most-recent major change as the Irish returned to the standard navy blue worn throughout the Ara Parseghian years and early portion of the Dan Devine era. The gold Irish helmets and pants remained unchanged.

When Gerry Faust took over in 1981, Notre Dame went to royal blue jerseys with three one-inch stripes on the sleeves, two gold surrounding one white. But the stripes were eliminated on the '84 tops, which didn't feature any trim or feathering other than the white numbers on the navy blue shirts. Lou Holtz's only change beginning in '86 involved adding the interlocked Notre Dame logo to the shoulder of the jerseys and to the left front side of the pants.

While dark blue jerseys with a gleaming gold helmet and gold pants is the signature uniform for the University of Notre Dame football team, green has developed into an unofficial third school color and is used across Notre Dame's 26 varsity sports as an added inspirational tool.

Any discussion about the green uniforms in Notre Dame athletic history begins with the Notre Dame - USC contest on Oct. 22, 1977. Irish head coach Dan Devine, taking a friendly suggestion from head basketball coach Digger Phelps during an off-season conversation, ordered special green jerseys four months in advance of the Irish-Trojan contest. Notre Dame had not donned green jerseys since a 1968 Thanksgiving Day game in Yankee Stadium against Syracuse.

In what was billed as the best-kept secret in Irish football history, most of the team was unaware of the uniform switch until 20 minutes before kickoff, although Devine allowed captains Ross Browner, Terry Eurick and Willie Fry to try on the new jerseys on Friday afternoon before the pep rally. Even though Fry hinted about the change at the rally that evening by calling for the fans to wear green to the game and referring to his teammates as the 'Green Machine', the secret remained safe until the team returned after pregame warm ups to find green jerseys with gold numbers hanging in each player's respective lockers.

Notre Dame Stadium was already operating at a

fever pitch that day before the team even took the field. The student body wheeled a homemade Trojan horse onto the field to symbolize the historical Fall of Troy. The Irish fans also were eager to make up for the 55-24 loss to USC in 1974, a game in which Notre Dame led 24-0 at halftime.

The Irish rolled to a 49-19 victory over USC in their green jerseys and the 'Green Machine' was born. Notre Dame wore the jerseys for the rest of the season, sweeping through the remainder of the schedule and thumping #1 Texas 38-10 in the Cotton Bowl to earn the National Championship.

Since that October day in 1977, the green jerseys have been used to give any Irish athletic team extra motivation for a big game, particularly during championship competition. Some Irish teams also have special green jerseys prepared if they are scheduled to play on St. Patrick's Day.

Gerry Faust outfitted his Irish teams in green jerseys twice for two victories over USC in 1983 and '85 (the team switched to green during halftime of the '85 game). Lou Holtz incorporated green twice in his tenure, spurring the team to a 1992 Sugar Bowl victory over Florida with green numbers on a white jersey and the team also wore green in a 41-24 loss to Colorado in the 1995 Fiesta Bowl. Bob Davie's Irish teams wore green in a 35-28 loss to Georgia Tech in the 1999 Gator Bowl, while Tyrone Willingham's team wore green in a 14-7 loss to Boston College in '02.

Head coach Charlie Weis employed the green jerseys against USC in '05 and the Irish responded with a memorable performance that pushed the defending national champion Trojans to the brink in a 34-31 last-second loss.

Green jerseys have developed into a special outfit for championship competition in Notre Dame's 26 varsity sports. The women's basketball team switches to green jerseys for its annual NCAA Tournament competition, which traditionally begins the same weekend as St. Patrick's Day.

In recent years, several varsity teams (men's basketball, women's basketball, baseball, hockey, softball and women's lacrosse) have worn green jerseys while competing in a championship game or while playing on St. Patrick's Day.

Though the 1977 Notre Dame-USC gridiron contest marked the renewal of green jerseys, Notre Dame football teams have been wearing green in one fashion or another since Knute Rockne patrolled the sidelines. In those days, the Notre Dame varsity team usually wore blue, while the freshman squad was outfitted in green.

But, on several occasions the varsity team did wear green — simply for purposes of distinction when the Irish opponent also came out in blue. Games against Navy, for example, in the late 1920s featured green-clad Notre Dame teams, to avoid confusion with the Navy's blue uniforms.

Rockne didn't mind using the color change as a psychological ploy. When Notre Dame faced Navy in Baltimore in 1927, the Irish head coach started his



second-string reserves. Navy retaliated by scoring a touchdown in the first five minutes of the game. But, just as the Midshipmen scored, reported George Trevor in the *New York Sun*, Rockne made his move:

"Instantaneously the Notre Dame regulars yanked off their blue outer sweaters and like a horde of green Gila monsters darted onto the field. From that moment on Notre Dame held the initiative, imposed its collective will upon the Navy."

The Irish came from behind to win that one 19-6 — then did the same thing the following year in Chicago's Soldier Field, this time beating Navy 7-0. The 1928 edition of the *Scholastic Football Review* included this description:

"Mr. K. K. Rockne may, or may not, be a psychologist. But, he did array his Fighting Irish in bright green jerseys for their battle with the United States Naval Academy. Mr. Rockne evidently surmised that garbing a band of native and adopted Irish in their native color is somewhat akin to showing a bull the Russian flag."

The green jerseys remained prominent throughout the Frank Leahy years — particularly so in September of 1947 when Heisman Trophy winner Johnny Lujack graced the cover of *Life* magazine clad in green. Several of Joe Kuharich's squads wore green with UCLA-style shoulder stripes and shamrocks on the helmets. Even Hugh Devore's 1963 team — after wearing navy blue all season — switched to green in the finale against Syracuse.

Faust's return to blue came after the new Irish coach suggested some research into the University archives to determine the history of Notre Dame's gold and blue colors.

Those findings indicated the blue color was actually Madonna blue, a light blue shade, as opposed to the navy blue shade that has been most common in recent Notre Dame uniforms.