

## Irish, Eagles Set For Intense Clash

Written by Sean Stires

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NOTRE DAME, Ind. – It's Notre Dame and Boston College. While it doesn't carry the same national cache as other rivalries like say Notre Dame vs. USC, Ohio State vs. Michigan or Oklahoma vs. Texas fans and players on both sides of this weekend's matchup know just how bitter and hard-hitting this series is.

Like many other 'hidden' rivalries on Notre Dame's schedule it is one that carries much more significance for ND's opponents than the Irish themselves. As the Irish found out last week against Pittsburgh, they have to match the intensity of their David-like opponents. It took a while for them to figure that out last week and they nearly paid the price.

"Unlike what we did last week we have to come out and know that BC's gonna give us there best and we have to come out and give them our best," Irish tackle and offensive captain Zack Martin said this week. "We've talked about playing to win and not just playing not to lose. We're gonna come out on Saturday and be ready for a dogfight and we're gonna be out there giving it our best."

A "dogfight" is typically what Notre Dame gets when they play Boston College. The nine games played by the only two FBS Catholic schools in the country since 2001 have been decided by an average of 7.5 points. The Eagles also won six straight in the series from 2001-2008. Just like 1993 and 2002, BC now has the ultimate chance to ruin ND's run at a national title and head coach Frank Spaziani knows it.

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“This is an opportunity,” Spaziani said this week of his team’s prime time date with destiny. “You have a high-profile team coming in with everything on the line for them. (It is) certainly a Carnegie Hall state. You don’t get these opportunities often. We would certainly like to be a little bit geared-up for them and get ready to go. We’ll see what happens. It’s a big opportunity.”

Whether or not his players or Irish players know where Carnegie Hall is, Spaziani is right. He is one of the most well liked and respected coaches in college football, and with a 2-7 record his team may not only be playing for a chance to prove themselves on a national stage but also save their coach’s job. The Irish expect the Eagles to come out swinging Saturday night.

“The last three times we’ve played BC, and I’ve seen it, the game is always going to be physical,” senior receiver Robby Toma said of his opponent’s mindset. “Those guys are big bodied guys. (They are) strong and coached well. We’re expecting a battle for four quarters and we’re excited for it. We’ve done that all year, so it’s nothing new for us.”

Brian Kelly has harped on “the process” to his team all year. The process of focusing on day-to-day work and preparation and not getting too high or too low based on who the opposition happens to be. The process appeared to get lost in translation somewhere last week, but Braxton Cave knows he and his teammates have to get it back to keep things on track Saturday night.

“We’re looking at it one game at a time like we’ve done all year,” Cave said of his approach for Boston College. “Nobody’s been out there and overdone it and shown us up. We’re gonna come out there and do what we’ve been doing every week – come out there and work hard and finish plays and get the ‘W’.”

No Notre Dame fan needs to be reminded about 1993 or 2002. Just uttering those years conjures-up nightmares of opportunities lost by unbeaten Irish teams in losses to Boston College. Kelly pleaded the fifth this week when asked about those BC teams knocking-off unbeaten Irish squads on those two occasions.

“I don’t downplay it, I just don’t have a lot of knowledge about it,” Kelly said with a laugh. “I didn’t know that, but do now. I will put that in the history bank of more information that I have that I won’t use.”

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While Kelly won't use it as negative motivation, BC is trying to use the history of upsets as a reminder to its fans. Boston College's official web site included a front page reminder with the headline 'Holy War: Greatest Moments' on Friday (the accompanying story also incorrectly says that BC won eight straight against ND from 2001-2008, but the series took a two-year hiatus in 2005 and 2006).

Regardless, the two teams have played every year since 2007 and in 16 of the last 18 seasons. That will change though once Notre Dame enters its agreement with the ACC. While the Fighting Irish are guaranteed to play games against five Atlantic Coast Conference teams per season and while BC is an ACC team, the two schools will not go head-to-head annually under the new agreement.

"I think it's a good rivalry," Spaziani began when asked about the pending discontinuation of the annual rivalry. "I think it's a good rivalry for Boston College and I think it's a good rivalry for Notre Dame. We have a lot of things in common."

"Just looking at it on the surface we should be playing each other. It makes sense. But there's a lot of factors that go into (it). Making sense isn't always the thing that works out."

Notre Dame has won the last three meetings in the series and has a 12-9 all-time record against the Eagles. Notre Dame has just as much to play for this year as they did in those infamous '93 and '02 thuds, and they know they have to be ready for a team that wants nothing more than to ruin 2012.

"I think for us it goes back to having the mindset of a champion," Manti Te'o said of his team's focus this week. "It doesn't matter who you line-up against or what record they have or what color they're wearing. That's football. If you want to win you have to do what winners do and find any way to win. We're gonna study film (and) find out ways to win and come on Saturday and execute that game plan."

Nose guard Louis Nix III was in and out of last week's game due to a bout with the flu, but the big man is getting back to full health for this week's game. Nix and the Irish played with the

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“heart of a champion” last week according to Kelly, and he says the key to matching BC’s intensity this week is simple.

“Just go out there and play hard,” Nix said. “We prepare every week. We just can’t come out sluggish. We’ve gotta come out like we did against Oklahoma and Michigan State and Michigan – just come out hard and keep fighting. Just listen to what the coaches have to say and just do your job.”