

Final BCS Game Notebook

Written by Sean Stires

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MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. – There was excitement, electricity and anticipation in the air, but in the end it did not matter. Alabama outplayed Notre Dame in nearly every sense on Monday night in a lopsided 42-14 win in the BCS Championship Game.

A Notre Dame defense that was dominant all season was pushed around for the first time by a more physical Alabama offensive line. The Irish uncharacteristically missed tackles early, leading to a result that was decided before the game's first 15 minutes had concluded.

"We had a hard time getting off the field," Irish Head Coach Brian Kelly said after the game of his team's defensive third down deficiencies. "A lot of that had to do with Alabama. They ran the ball effectively."

The Crimson Tide ran the ball to the tune of 265 yards – the most for an Irish opponent this season. Alabama's 8-of-13 showing (61%) on third downs is actually misleading. 'Bama was even more thoroughly dominant on third downs early in the game, going 3-for-3 on third down on its second touchdown drive, which covered 61 yards on 10 plays and chewed-up 4:49 on the clock. The Tide converted its first four third downs and was 6-for-8 on third down in the first half, while Notre Dame was 0-for-5.

Alabama's touchdown on the game's opening drive marked the first time Notre Dame allowed a first quarter score all season. They would score on their second and third possessions as well,

going up 21-0 in bludgeoning fashion. At the end of the first quarter Alabama led 14-0 and had outgained Notre Dame 202-23 in total yardage.

“We’ve got to get physically stronger (and) continue to close the gap,” Kelly said of what his team must do to keep growing as it moves forward. “Just overall you need to see what it looks like. Our guys clearly know what it looks like.”

The Irish were the only team in the FBS not to allow a touchdown drive of more than 75 yards this year. Bama had two in the first half and also had a 71-yard TD drive. Alabama also went 97 yards in 10 plays on its first possession of the second half. It was capped by a 34-yard TD pass to Amari Cooper.

Too Many Whiffs

There are no official stats kept for missed tackles over the course of the game, but Notre Dame was grabbing at air early in the game. Their primary target was running back Eddie Lacy, who would churn out 140 yards and a touchdown on the ground. A big part of his night was the ability to both run through tackles and make Irish would-be defenders miss.

“I have to evaluate whether I did a good enough job as the head coach in getting tackling done for our players,” Kelly admitted after the game. “I think everything is on the table when you see so many missed tackles, but that will require a little bit of research and looking at it a little bit more in depth.”

Zeke Motta led Notre Dame with 16 tackles, while Manti Te’o added 10. The tackles they collected were not the story though. Both missed key tackles early in the game. Motta missed the chance to tackle Lacy for a loss on third and one on Alabama’s second TD drive. The result was a 20-yard run, followed by a 3-yard touchdown pass a play later and a 14-0 ‘Bama lead.

“They’re very big and they’re very athletic and very strong,” Te’o said of the Alabama offense. “We battled (but) they just did what Alabama does. We had opportunities to make plays; we just didn’t capitalize on those opportunities.”

In the Red Zone

Alabama scored red zone touchdowns on each of its first three possessions – two of them in the first half. They finished the night a perfect 5-for-5 in red zone scoring opportunities – all touchdowns – after the Irish had allowed just eight opponent red zone TDs through the season's first 12 games. The Tide finishes the season an astounding 46 of 62 (74%) in red zone touchdown chances.

A Long Streak

Alabama had a streak of 108 minutes and 7 seconds without allowing a point in a BCS Championship Game. The Crimson Tide scored 69 unanswered points during that span, which extended back to their 2009 BCS title game against Texas.

The streak ended when Golson scored on a two-yard touchdown run in the 3rd quarter. It included last year's 21-0 win over LSU for the second of what are now three national titles in a four-year span.

"Some people use the word dynasty," Kelly said of Alabama's recent dominance in the college football world. "I look at it as program consistency. It starts at the top and filters its way through the entire program. What coach Saban has been able to do has really put an exclamation point on consistency."

End of An Era

Manti Te'o's career came to an end on Monday night as he played his 51st and final game in a Notre Dame uniform. He will be gone, but he sees great things for his teammates and their new teammates in the future.

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“We’re close,” Te’o began when asked about the state of Notre Dame football. “Obviously we’re not there. If we were there we would be holding the crystal ball (championship trophy). But we’re close, because if we weren’t close we definitely wouldn’t be in South Beach.”

Motta and many others, like Theo Riddick, who was in tears in the Irish locker room and barely able to speak after the game, Mike Golic, Braxton Cave, and Kapron Lewis-Moore to name a few, have also played their last games for Notre Dame.

“I just feel bad, because it hurts going out with these seniors,” Motta said while choking back tears of his own. “Next year they have something to look forward to though. I think that we all represented the team well and we would have liked to represent ourselves better tonight. But at the end of the day, we move forward after this and grow.”