

BCS Analysis: Report Card

Written by Sean Mele

Wednesday, 09 January 2013 18:02



The Fighting Irish had most of the fight taken out of them Monday night by Alabama as the Tide dominated just about every facet of the game en route to a decisive 42-14 victory. Although as a whole Notre Dame struggled to keep pace with what Alabama was doing there were still a few individual efforts that were worth noting. With that in mind let's take a look at the last report card to be issued for the 2012 season.

Quarterback

Freshman Everett Golson did some really good things against Alabama and his mobility probably saved him on a few occasions from either being sacked or knocked down. Golson completed nearly 60 percent of his passes while throwing for 270 yards and a touchdown. When the game was out of reach and there was nothing left to do but pass the redshirt freshman responded by engineering two scoring drives that were spearheaded by his arm strength and accuracy.

Although I still believe he struggles with his deep ball and fade route accuracy, he throws short and intermediate routes as good anybody in the country. I also believe that he has a tendency to vacate the pocket too soon and needs to learn a little more patience in that regard. Overall though, under the bright lights of the BCS Championship Game, I thought the young quarterback fared pretty well. **Grade: B**

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Running back

Theo Riddick and Cierre Wood were pretty quiet Monday night and the 14 rushing attempts they had between them may have had a lot to do with their lack of production. Irish head coach Brian Kelly made the decision to be aggressive with his play calling from the start and that, combined with the fact Notre Dame found themselves a 28-0 hole, made Notre Dame's rushing attack pretty much nonexistent.

Even when they did get the chance to show their stuff they were limited to only 2.8 yards per carry against Alabama's defense. Riddick did have a long run of 20 yards and Wood had one of seven, but that type of production was rare and really unsustainable throughout the night. Riddick did catch the only touchdown pass of the night, but that was his only catch of the game.

Grade: C

Wide receiver

TJ Jones and DaVaris Daniels were the bright spot of not only the offense, but of the entire Notre Dame team. Daniels caught six balls for 115 yards while Jones caught seven for 90. They caught the ball in traffic, in tight coverage, over the middle, and along the sidelines. Jones put on a clinic of how a receiver is supposed to get his feet down along the sidelines before going out of bounds. I especially liked the way both of them worked to get open when Golson broke out of the pocket and was in trouble. These two have turned the wide receiver position into a strength for the Irish heading into the 2013 season. **Grade: A-**

Tight end

It was pretty clear Tyler Eifert left everything he had on the field Monday night in Miami. His refusal to be denied the football along with the extra effort he gave after the catch really showed his heart and why he'll be successful on the next level. Eifert caught six passes for 61 yards and I'll be damned if it shouldn't have been seven for about 80 had that "incomplete" on the sideline been overturned.

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Eifert and Troy Niklas had a decent night blocking, but Alabama's strength and athleticism got the best of them a few times in run blocking. Niklas found himself called upon to pass block more often than not and held up fairly well. He also found himself on the sidelines when the Irish turned to the pass in an effort to cut down Alabama's lead. **Grade: B**

Offensive line

Everyone on the offensive line struggled at one time or another Monday night. With only four runs of over five yards to accompany a 1.7 yard per carry average it can hardly be called a good night for the big fellas up front. They also gave up two sacks and two quarterback hurries, which isn't bad considering at one point in the game everybody in the stadium knew Golson was going to be chucking the ball all over the field.

Alabama confused them with their blitz schemes and some of the communication issues that were evident at the beginning of the season reared its ugly head against the Tide. There were definitely issues with sustaining blocks and that was the result of the athletic talent of Alabama's front seven.

Assignment-wise the run blocking was decent, however the issue remained throughout the game whether or not Alabama's inside linebackers were going to be blocked. Just about every running play that both inside linebackers were blocked the Irish gained yards, but when the likes of CJ Mosley were allowed to run free the results were not very good.

Zach Martin played the best game of the starting five, followed by Chris Watt and Braxton Cave. Mike Golic Jr. held up better than expected while Christian Lombard didn't seem to have an answer for the quick swim move he was beaten by three or four times. **Grade: C-**

Defensive line

Louis Nix III did everything he could to cause havoc in the Alabama backfield, but Barrett Jones is too good a player to allow that to happen for an entire game. With Jones's injury he was very content with taking Nix wherever he wanted to go and walling him off from the ball carrier.

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Kapron Lewis-Moore was doing a nice job before his injury and was fighting to hold his gap as best he could. Stephon Tuitt played a decent game as well, but had trouble getting off blocks consistently.

The question when you play an offensive line this good is, "What constitutes a job well done?" Is it hanging on for dear life and not getting driven off the ball? Or is it that not good enough? Is the expectation that not only do they take on the block, but get involved in the tackle as well? Whatever the answer is let me say it's difficult to continually take on players of this caliber and expect to do the minimum requirements of your job and at the same time make plays. Notre Dame's defensive line did the minimum requirements of their job most of the time, but to go above and beyond that against this group was just asking too much. **Grade: B-**

Linebacker

Notre Dame's linebackers had a rough night against Alabama's running game. The major issue was once Alabama's offensive line locked up on any of them it was over and done. There wasn't a chance Dan Fox or even Manti Te'o was going to be able to free themselves from the likes of Chase Warmack. I can honestly recall Carlo Calabrese being the only linebacker that actually took on a block rather than continually being on the receiving end of them. Alabama's offensive line and running game literally consumed Notre Dame's linebackers, especially on the inside.

The tackling (or lack thereof) has been gone over again and again, but even when they were in position they still failed in bringing down Eddie Lacy or TJ Yeldon. There was one play when Danny Spond attempted to tackle Lacy and he was thrown to the ground like a Pop Warner player. That's not the only example, as just about every aspect of technique-sound tackling was forgotten for nearly the entire game. Diving at feet and being so out of control you can't break down as you've been taught for years is not the way to attack running backs like the ones they played Monday night. **Grade: D**

Defensive back

Safety Zeke Motta had the worst 16-tackle game in the history of college football. It's hard to believe he had that many tackles with as many tackles as he missed. The angles he took to the

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football were poor and it left him diving and grasping for air too many times. If he had just settled down and slow-played the running back for only a second or two he would have been under control and able to make many the tackles he missed.

Irish cornerbacks Bennett Jackson and KeiVarae Russell missed several tackles and had several errors in pass coverage as well. There were too many instances when their quarter was threatened deep and they found themselves a step or two behind. Russell also got lost in man coverage against Amari Cooper and that resulted in an Alabama touchdown. All in all, Jackson's coverage wasn't too bad, except for the second play of a game when he let the number one receiver to his side run right past him for a 29-yard gain. **Grade: D+**

Special teams

Not too much action for the special teams against Alabama, although Ben Turk did average 42.8 yards per punt, which is a good showing for him. Davonte' Neal muffed a punt, but luckily it went out of bounds and no damage was done. Neal also fielded a punt inside his own 10-yard line while trying to make a play for his team and ended up getting tackled for no gain. Punt and kick coverage was good and Alabama's return men were held in check pretty much the entire night. **Grade: B-**

Coaching

I've said this since Monday night and I'm sticking to my guns: I'm not sure how much it would have mattered on the final result of the game had the offense or defense been called differently. Sometimes no matter how good your schemes have been for you in the past, talent wins over strategy most of the time, especially when that talent is coached by Nick Saban. It was obvious to everybody watching the game that Alabama had equal or better talent than Notre Dame at just about every position on the field.

I believe Brian Kelly was aggressive with the passing game on first down and that benefited the offense, but sustaining drives against Alabama's defense is a difficult task. The Irish averaged 10.6 yards the first play of each of their nine offensive series, but ended up punting five times, throwing an interception once, and turning the ball over on downs another. It was definitely tough sledding when trying to figure out what works against Alabama's defense.

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Bob Diaco employed the same defensive scheme he's used all season to try and stop Alabama's offense. It's the same scheme that was the driving force behind Notre Dame success this season. People were in the right place at the right time, but they just couldn't get off blocks or make a tackle. Some of that was poor technique and fundamentals and some of it was Alabama's superiority. **Grade: C**