

## Staying No. 1 Means Beating USC

Written by Brian Smith  
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The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum provided many great and many horrible moments for Irish fans over the years. This next Saturday night, the two long-standing rivals do battle again.

I make no bones about it. I despise the Trojans, as do most Notre Dame fans I know. The brash attitudes of many of their players, the “LA Attitude” and arrogance of many of their bandwagon fans, and the history of a corrupt program gets under my skin. That’s only part of the reason why this game is so important. Notre Dame can play for all the marbles if it knocks off the Trojans.

What’s the game plan to defeat the Trojans? Here’s my take, point by point.

### Be prepared for trick plays

No offense to **Max Wittek**, the new quarterback with **Matt Barkley** injured and not playing, but he’s a greenhorn. In a pro-style offense, an inexperienced signal caller usually spells doom. Why? For this type of offense, it’s about repetitions in practice. Barkley received the vast majority of those repetitions the past four years. Thus, the Trojans offense will likely go through spurts of complete disaster against any opponent it faces with a new quarterback. Against Notre Dame’s defense, that’s a task he’s not up to conquering without a lot of help. That help will come through a few possible scenarios.

Fake punts, onside kicks, reverses, Wildcat, throw-back passes, etc. The Trojans will throw the kitchen sink at Notre Dame. What do they have to lose? If the Trojans can keep it close through the middle of the third quarter, say down 20-14, perhaps Wittek could make one key play to win the game for the Trojans. Those trick plays could be how the Trojans keep the game close. Of course they could totally backfire. But again, what do the Trojans have to lose?

### Stop the run

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This one is easy. The Trojans are not going to throw the ball all over the field with consistent success (although I'd love to see them try). The Trojans average 159.3 yards rushing per game. If Notre Dame can hold the Trojans to roughly 100 to 125 yards on the ground, it will probably spell doom for the Trojans. It's hard to imagine Wittek converting a high percentage of his third down tosses for first downs. A big reason why is Irish defensive coordinator **Bob Diaco** will mix up coverages in an attempt to confuse the young signal caller, and interceptions and sacks will be the goal. The more long-yardage situations Wittek finds himself in, the more likely the big plays will happen for the Irish defense.

### Ball control offense

Notre Dame does a great job of grinding out drives. Keeping the will away from the Trojans by converting third downs and chewing up the clock will apply even more pressure to Wittek because he'll be working with fewer possessions. It's a way to mess with the psyche of the young quarterback even when he's not on the field.

### Turnovers

This one is self-explanatory. The easiest way for an underdog to stay in any game comes via turnovers. If Notre Dame is even or plus in the turnover department, game over.

### Step on the throat

If the Irish get a two score lead, knock'em out with the big play and kill any thought of the Trojans winning. In short, do not play conservative. There's a really good way to accomplish this goal. **Everett Golson** made several very good deep passes during the Wake Forest game. Look for more shots down the field. **Tyler Eifert** and **Chris Brown** will be likely targets, but do not discount other Irish players being used as possible deep ball threats. Notre Dame might take a few shots early in the game in an attempt to seize momentum and crush the Trojans' will.

### Do what you do

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Notre Dame's defense tackled well this season. It pressured the quarterback well. The defense made clutch interceptions. All of those things need to continue. The offense needs to continue to improve as well. Overall, just play Irish Football.

### **Final Thoughts**

There's no reason for the Irish to lose with Barkley not playing. That's a devastating blow to the Trojans' chances of winning. If Notre Dame plays smart and watches out for the trick plays, doesn't turn the ball over and stays true to its personality, Notre Dame rolls.

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