

Army Bowl: Practice Reports

Written by David Beaudin

Thursday, 03 January 2013 21:01



SAN ANTONIO – Weather affected both practices on Thursday here at the U.S. Army All-American Bowl, but I was there for both and was also able to catch up with former USC defensive line commit Eddie Vanderdoes for his thoughts heading into the final weeks of the process.

EAST PRACTICE

While the West chose to stay indoors and walk-through plays during the morning session, the East hit the field at Heroes Stadium on an unusually raw and bitter cold, windy, and wet morning here. While the blustery weather and sleeting rain didn't keep them from practicing, it certainly didn't serve well for the quarterbacks.

Uncommitted wide receiver Marquez North did not practice in the morning and none of the coaches offered any insight as to why. And while he might have missed practice, he didn't miss much through the air as the story of the practice was the lack of completions and quarterback accuracy as the wet ball was all over the place. The erratically thrown balls didn't stop Florida commit Demarcus Robinson from drawing some "ooh's and ahhh's" from his teammates as he made several of his East ally defensive backs slip and fall with his stellar route running.

The only Notre Dame offensive skill commit on the East squad still continued to impress. Greg Bryant looked "undersized" next to Alabama commit - and Trent Richardson imposter - Derrick

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Henry all practice, however he more than held his own during pass protection drills and blitz pickup period. This is a good sign for the Irish if they'd like to use him next year and that is usually the biggest challenge and adjustment for freshman running backs cracking the lineup in their rookie seasons.

Bryant showed off his quick feet and sound footwork in the backfield prior to getting the ball (i.e. on counters, stretch, powers, misdirections and swing screens) and displayed his uncanny quick burst through even the smallest of holes. He did a great job hitting seams with one cut and exploding through the line of scrimmage.

Irish offensive line commit John Montelus was thrown from working with the second group at tackle to the first East offensive line group at guard. The massive Massachusetts native looked a little out of place as he struggled to learn the new spot. His novice guard play stuck out most when working inside and trying to climb to the next level.

Unaccustomed to being the one who usually goes up to the linebackers in the outside zone scheme, he tended to work flat down the line and miss the linebackers shooting open air. The good thing for the Irish is none of his deficiencies were due to a lack of physical skill (and of course certainly not lack of size) and they were all corrections that are coachable if they decide to move Montelus around on the line in the future.

Oftentimes, while just an exhibition contest, these all-star games are an opportunity for young men like Montelus to be exposed to slightly different positions and most definitely a lot better talent, which can only serve him and the Irish well in the future.

Unfortunately for Notre Dame, the starting right guard for the East, USC commit Khaliel Rogers showed tremendous athleticism. And while 6-3 may be just a tick generous on the roster, there isn't anyone in the secondary looking forward to seeing him hustle down the line on screens.

Irish hopeful Al-Quadin Muhammad may have been the player of the day.

The Don Bosco (NJ) product is relentless in his pursuit of the ball, displays a great attitude, and

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can just flat out play football. While his 6-4 frame may be a bit leaner than the other defensive ends, it is not an indictment of his physicality. I loved watching Muhammad initiate contact with stout offensive tackles, using great get-off and shooting his hands lightning fast, shedding blocks and flying to the ball. His effort as he sprints to the ball in an exhibition practice on a cold and raining morning only enhances his natural quickness and lends me to believe he will have a noteworthy career.

While Doug Randolph's position listed on the future Notre Dame roster may be unsure, there is no uncertainty in my mind that he belongs and will be an asset regardless of position. Randolph practiced today at inside linebacker and was really impressive scrapping to the ball downhill and reading flow extremely fast. He shot open air great during inside drill and team. If Notre Dame decides to keep him at linebacker, he needs to be able to do a better job working over the top of blocks as he scrapes laterally. This is certainly something that is a learned skill and his great natural instincts should make it very easy to coach.

WEST PRACTICE

The West squad got out for a light afternoon practice as the rain and sleet subsided, while the cold hung around.

The word around the West practice was that Torii Hunter Jr's surgery was a success. Irish commit Corey Robinson says that Hunter has a great support system. Robinson saw him at the hospital yesterday and didn't hesitate while commenting on the injury, "I've never seen anyone in that much pain."

Robinson went on to say that he is doing well due to all of his support and encouragement.

"Torri has a very supportive family, along with all of the ND guys here pulling for him, and really all of the West team lending their support as we have grown close this week." says Robinson.

Another West teammate and future Irish teammate Robinson has grown close with is offensive lineman Steve Elmer. Elmer and Robinson are rehearsing their roommate skills this week as

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they are staying with each other in Robinson's home city of San Antonio. They both agree it is going real well, which is good news because they will rooming with one another in South Bend in less than two weeks as they will both start in the spring semester.

Robinson was forthcoming with how overwhelming and hectic it has been to finish high school this fall semester, as he had to take an extra economics course and still needs to finish one test before January 12th, when he heads up to South Bend. Still, he has made time to be a very gracious host in the Alamo City according to multiple West Team Army All-Americans. When asked if Robinson wanted to "show off" his talents this week, he humbly said, "I'd like to get a West Team win and the main thing is to just enjoy the experience."

Future Irish linebacker stud Jaylon Smith was his usual self at the West practice. And to say that he is a great player would be the understatement of the year.

By now, we have all heard the praise and accolades that have deservingly been thrown Smith's way. However, Smith's latest good work has gone in the way of trying to convince recent USC decommitment, defensive lineman Eddie Vanderdoes, that Notre Dame is the right place. The good thing for Irish fans is that Vanderdoes has done a lot of homework on the prestigious school himself.

"The big thing for me is the academic prestige and ND graduating 99 percent of their athletes and it's obviously a football program back on the rise." says Vanderdoes.

He is a well-spoken young man who seems to have a firm grip on what he wants from his collegiate experience both on and off the field.

Vanderdoes reiterated multiple times the importance of Notre Dame's academic reputation and their graduation rate. And while USC would keep Vanderdoes in his native state of California, he doesn't see going to school far away as an issue.

"They recruit guys from all over America, so they are all going through the same thing," said Vanderdoes. "Jaylon says it's a great place and something I really need to see for myself."

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And while Smith has helped talk up Notre Dame, Vanderdoes does state that none of the players at the practices have been pushy and they have all been understanding of the recruiting process and they are obviously going through or have been through the same type of things.

Vanderdoes loves Notre Dame's academic reputation, but isn't shy to express his affection for what they do on the field as well.

"I love that they are very multiple," he says. "They play the 3-4 and the 4-3 and I really like how they mix it up." says Vanderdoes.

Notre Dame is looking at him to play the five-technique and occasionally the seven-technique and even move into the three-technique and one-technique at times. His eyes lit up when talking about possibly moving all over the place as a part of the Irish scheme.

He stated this all while unassumingly saying that he would be willing to play anywhere along the defensive line, even the nose (one-tech) that most schools have recruited him as. The Notre Dame coaches believe they can make better use of his unique talents by playing multiple positions.

I feel he looks and plays as your prototypical five-tech who could eventually move down after a few meals at the North and South Dining Halls, plus the hearty Notre Dame training tables.

Vanderdoes stated that his reason for decommitting from USC had nothing to do with what they did wrong. In fact he was high in his praise of Ed Orgeron, who the Trojan coach recruiting him. He simply wants to open up his recruiting and given his intellect, really make an educated decision while having all of the information.

Plus, Vanderdoes said that he has been "100 percent honest," throughout the entire process and he feels he has received that from USC as well. With that said, he did not want to mislead them and be the only recruit to flip in that class right before signing day.

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“When I get home, I am going to sit down with my parents and come up with the actual dates of my visits.” says Vanderdoes.

We do know one thing; he will be paying close attention to the National Championship game. He stated that he will visit Alabama and Notre Dame for sure. The others on his list of five continue to be USC, Washington, and LSU. Though, he did not comment on whether he would take any other visits besides the two who square off this Monday night.

David Beaudin is the head coach at St. Mary's Hall in San Antonio and is providing ISD with coverage from the Army Bowl this week.