The phone calls and text messages from reporters were incessant. Rumors and speculation among fans were running wild on Internet message boards. Two of the nation's elite football programs were locked in a tug of war.

And **Alex Anzalone** was in the middle of it all, but somehow he managed to stay above it all.

"I think I personally did a good job ignoring it," said Anzalone. "I obviously have parents who support me and will back me up with whatever. They didn't put too much pressure on me. I tried to just block it out with football going on. It wasn't too bad for me. I just knew I was going to end up at the place where I had to be and where I would be the happiest."

After committing to Notre Dame in July, the four-star linebacker from Wyomissing, Pa., took a visit to Florida in October that sparked his interest in the Gators while creating tension in South Bend.

"There was obviously a miscommunication, but I'd say it probably started after I went to Florida for the LSU game and learning about some of the academics and hanging out with some of the commits, which I hadn't done before I committed to Notre Dame," said Anzalone.

“I guess that just made me have second thoughts.”

After initially believing he was going to study business, Anzalone started looking into medicine and Florida was able to open his eyes about what it could offer.

“They have a pre-med program where pretty much you get accepted into their medical school without taking the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test), so that interested me,” said Anzalone.

He isn’t sure if there was ever a point when he was leaning toward the Gators over the Irish, but despite a fractured relationship with Notre Dame, Anzalone knew he wasn’t going to make a final decision without being completely sure.

“I just knew that I had to get back to Notre Dame,” he said.

Conversations with Notre Dame recruiting coordinator Tony Alford and defensive coordinator Bob Diaco helped ease the entire situation, but rumors were swirling when Anzalone announced he wouldn’t be making a planned visit to South Bend for the BYU game. Still, Anzalone and his family were still working hard behind the scenes to find a time for him to return and he ended up driving all day Saturday to make it to South Bend the Sunday after the Irish’s triple-overtime win over Pittsburgh.

The process that Diaco and Alford began in the weeks after the Florida visit was completed during Anzalone’s trip back to Notre Dame.

“It was really good for me personally,” he said. “I just got another feel for campus and all of the coaches and players. I hadn’t been there since June, so it was really big for me. I had a good time and it was good for me to get my decision over with.”

His questions about the academic support were answered.

“I didn’t realize I’d be able to do it and Notre Dame actually has people do it like Andrew Hendrix,” said Anzalone. “They have people actually doing it and succeeding. The kids who do pre-med at Notre Dame have an 80-percent acceptance rate for medical school.

“Things like that made me realize it was the right place for me. There is support there and there was just miscommunication with all of that.”

The coaches were welcoming, but honest both in how they felt about him and how they felt about his decision.

“Coach Diaco pretty much told me he didn’t want me to go to Notre Dame if it wasn’t the right place for me because I wouldn’t be productive on the field or off the field,” Anzalone recalled. “But he said he knew Notre Dame was the place for me. They were pretty cool with everything. They didn’t intimidate me or anything like that.”

Toward the end of the visit, Alford sat Anzalone down and asked him what was on his mind. By that point, the 2013 linebacker had already decided Notre Dame was in fact the place for him.

“I told him and he was excited,” Anzalone said of Alford. “He was really happy and went around telling all of the other coaches and they were all giving me hugs.”

Anzalone publicly informed the world of his decision on Twitter later that night, but not before getting in touch with the coaching staff at Florida.

“They were disappointed obviously, but this was their third time having me tell them no, so I guess they’re used to it,” he said.

It was a long and stressful process for both sides.

Anzalone was committed to Ohio State before Notre Dame and at one point was strongly looking at Penn State, so he had to factor in the fallout from the Sandusky scandal. Meanwhile, the Irish are having a tough enough time try to balance their scholarship numbers without having to worry about who is really in and who isn't.

But both Anzalone and Notre Dame are probably better off for having gone through it.

"I definitely think so," said Anzalone. "When I get on campus, you can say there was a little adversity that we already dealt with. It just made me closer with the coaches and we definitely got to know each other better through it. I think it'll definitely help me down the line."

His fellow commits also welcomed him back into the family. They won't have to deal with anymore inquiries from reporters about what he's going to do, but they'll still have to deal with Anzalone's pranks, like the one he pulled last week telling his future teammates that the nation's top defensive end, Robert Nkemdiche, was going to be part of the group as well.

"It makes it really awesome," Anzalone said of his fellow #IrishMob13 members. "I couldn't ask for any better kids. They're all good kids and have the same balance of academics and athletics on their mind. That's important to me and my family. I couldn't ask for any better kids."

When he committed in July, Anzalone planned on wearing Manti Te'o's jersey number, but has now decided to continue wearing his own high school number.

"I'm going to rock 24," he said. "I was just thinking and I know there's not going to be another Manti. Obviously those are going to be big shoes to fill, I'm not intimidated by that or anything, but I just want to make my own legacy."

It also gives Anzalone the chance to pay tribute to some of his coaches in Pennsylvania who helped him get where he is.

His Wyomissing High School squad is still unbeaten and continuing through the playoffs. One reason he squeezed the visit to South Bend in when he did was because he wasn't sure if his postseason schedule would allow him to visit later. Well, it will as this weekend's game is on Friday night and Anzalone will be on campus again for Saturday's game against Wake Forest.

In the end, Anzalone found peace and while he's enjoying his final high school season, he's already looking forward to enrolling at Notre Dame in January.

"I'm just relieved," he said. "I'm real excited. I'm looking forward to getting the feel for everything. I'm just excited to be there."