

WEEK THIRTEEN

NOTRE DAME AT USC

LOS ANGELES (AP) Ian Book passed for 352 yards, Dexter Williams went 52 yards on a go-ahead touchdown run and No. 3 Notre Dame completed an unbeaten regular season and likely secured a spot in the College Football Playoff with a 24-17 over longtime rival Southern California on Saturday night. Chris Finke caught an early TD pass for the Fighting Irish (12-0, No. 3 CFP), who showed playoff-level tenacity in rallying from an early 10-point deficit, their largest of the season. Tony Jones Jr. then took a short pass 51 yards for a touchdown with 3:09 to play to finish off Notre Dame's 10th perfect regular season since 1945, the first since 2012.

Notre Dame is all but certain to be chosen for the four-team playoff, and this win could keep the Irish away from powerhouse Alabama in the first postseason game.

Williams rushed for 97 yards as the Irish overcame a slow start in the 90th edition in this famed intersectional rivalry. Notre Dame didn't score until Finke's TD catch shortly before halftime, but the Irish ran off 24 consecutive points and shut out USC in the second half until Tyler Vaughns' TD catch with 48 seconds to play.

J.T. Daniels passed for 349 yards for the Trojans (5-7), who will stay home for the bowl season after their first losing season since 2000. Vaughns caught 12 passes for 120 yards in what might have been the final game for coach Clay Helton, who is under pressure after the Trojans lost five of their final six games in a dismaying collapse.

After USC won eight straight over Notre Dame in the 2000s, the Irish have claimed the Jeweled Shillelagh in six of the last nine meetings in this classic college football matchup. Notre Dame is the first road team to win in the series since 2012, when the Irish also completed an unbeaten regular season with a victory at the Coliseum.

Only four USC teams have finished with losing records since 1961, but this clearly talented group gave a tough game to the powerhouse Irish, who faced their first double-digit deficit of the year when USC went up 10-0 in the second quarter. The Trojans' 289 yards in the first half were 64 more than the Irish had allowed before halftime all season.

Notre Dame had only trailed twice at any point beforehand in their perfect season, but Williams bounced his 52-yard go-ahead run down the USC sideline shortly after halftime. Justin Yoon set a Notre Dame record with his 58th career field goal late in the third, putting the Irish up 17-10. Although Jones' late rumble to the end zone clinched the expected result for Notre Dame, the Trojans were competitive with an elite opponent despite the roiling subplot of their coach's future.

Helton won the Pac-12 last season and the Rose Bowl just two years ago, but a large portion of the Trojans' fan base is publicly agitating for the dismissal of the coach, who got a contract extension through 2023 just nine months ago.

When Helton's face appeared in a recorded announcement on the scoreboard in the first half, he was booed by a portion of the Coliseum crowd of 59,821 - the smallest for the Notre Dame-USC game in Los Angeles since 1960.

But USC got a 14-yard TD run on its opening drive by Vavae Malepeai, who missed the second half with an injury. When Michael Brown hit a field goal early in the second quarter, Notre Dame faced its first double-digit deficit of the year. The Irish offense finally scored 2:20 before halftime, capping a difficult 64-yard drive with Book's 24-yard throw to Finke, who hadn't caught a TD pass since the season opener against Michigan.

USC's 10-7 halftime lead could have been much larger, but receivers Michael Pittman Jr. and Amon-Ra St. Brown both fumbled after catches in Notre Dame territory.

THE TAKEAWAY

Notre Dame: The Irish showed resilience throughout their cross-country odyssey of a season, and narrowly beating an inspired USC squad is nothing about which to be ashamed. They'll be glad to have the test as they head toward a two-game shot at their first national championship since 1988.

USC: The Trojans showed up well for Helton despite the bleak circumstances, but were undone again by turnovers, penalties and poor play after halftime. USC athletic director Lynn Swann is expected to announce Helton's future soon.

Scoring Summary -----

FIRST QUARTER	ND	USC
USC TD 11:26		
Vavae Malepeai 14 Yd Run (Michael Brown Kick)	0	7
8 plays, 78 yards, 3:34		
SECOND QUARTER	ND	USC
USC FG 11:51		
Michael Brown 30 Yd Field Goal	0	10
13 plays, 50 yards, 5:56		
ND TD 2:20		
Chris Finke 24 Yd pass from Ian Book (Justin Yoon Kick)	7	10
11 plays, 64 yards, 4:41		
THIRD QUARTER	ND	USC
ND TD 10:55		
Dexter Williams 52 Yd Run (Justin Yoon Kick)	14	10
2 plays, 67 yards, 0:33		
ND FG 1:07		
Justin Yoon 46 Yd Field Goal	17	10
8 plays, 31 yards, 2:45		
FOURTH QUARTER	ND	USC
ND TD 3:09		
Tony Jones Jr. 51 Yd pass from Ian Book (Justin Yoon Kick)	24	10
6 plays, 70 yards, 2:44		
USC TD 0:48		
Tyler Vaughns 20 Yd pass from JT Daniels (Michael Brown Kick)	24	17
9 plays, 60 yards, 2:21		

Team Stats	ND	USC
First Downs	23	24
Total Yards	473	443
Total Plays	70	75
Avg Gain Per Play	6.8	5.9
Net Yards Rushing	121	94
Rushes	31	24
Yards Per Rush	3.9	3.9
Net Yards Passing	352	349
Comp-Att	22-39	37-51
Yards Per Pass	9.0	6.8
Times Sacked	3	2
Yds Lost To Sacks	-11	-18
Interceptions	1	0
Punts	4	6
Punt Average	47.3	38.5
Penalties	3	8
Penalty Yards	38	71
Fumbles	0	2
Fumbles Lost	0	2
Possession	25:49	34:11

Individual Stats

RUSHING							
ND	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	Long		
Dexter Williams	16	97	6.1	1	52		
Ian Book	7	16	2.3	0	16		
Tony Jones Jr.	3	15	5.0	0	15		
Jafar Armstrong	1	0	0.0	0	0		
Chris Finke	1	-1	-1.0	0	0		
Team	3	-6	-2.0	0	0		
USC	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	Long		
Aca'Cedric Ware	13	68	5.2	0	13		
Markese Stepp	5	23	4.6	0	9		
Vavae Malepeai	4	21	5.3	1	14		
JT Daniels	2	-18	-9.0	0	0		
PASSING							
ND	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Ian Book	22	39	352	9.0	2	1	144.0
USC	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
JT Daniels	37	51	349	6.8	1	0	136.5
RECEIVING							
ND	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	Long		
Chris Finke	7	86	12.3	1	24		
Miles Boykin	3	73	24.3	0	38		
Chase Claypool	5	73	14.6	0	28		
Dexter Williams	5	54	10.8	0	22		
Tony Jones Jr.	1	51	51.0	1	51		
Alize Mack	1	15	15.0	0	15		
USC	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	Long		
Tyler Vaughns	12	120	10.0	1	28		
Amon-Ra St. Brown	10	94	9.4	0	23		
Michael Pittman Jr.	7	91	13.0	0	35		
Velus Jones Jr.	3	24	8.0	0	12		
Devon Williams	1	10	10.0	0	10		
Markese Stepp	1	7	7.0	0	7		
Aca'Cedric Ware	2	2	1.0	0	2		
Vavae Malepeai	1	1	1.0	0	1		

Final	1	2	3	4	T
ND	0	7	10	7	24
USC	7	3	0	7	17