

WEEK TWO  
BALL STATE AT NOTRE DAME

SOUTH BEND, Ind. -- Notre Dame coach Brian Kelly fell on his sword after his eighth-ranked Fighting Irish struggled offensively against Ball State in what many assumed would be a tuneup game.

"I obviously didn't do a good enough job getting them up to play at the level they need to play," Kelly said. "Ball State did a great job coming into this game and doing what it needed to do. Their preparation was great, their coaching was better."

On the scoreboard, it was a 24-16 victory for Notre Dame. But it wasn't easy, and it wasn't pretty.

The Irish (2-0), coming off an emotional 24-17 victory over Michigan, looked lackluster against the Mid-American Conference foe whose campus in Muncie is a 2 1/2-hour drive away. The Cardinals (1-1) also played nothing like the 34 1/2-point underdogs they were labeled in the schools' first meeting in football.

Junior strong safety Jalen Elliott picked off Ball State quarterback Riley Neal twice -- the first interceptions by a Notre Dame safety in the last 14 games -- and the Irish turned them into a pair of rushing touchdowns of 31 and 1 yards by junior Tony Jones Jr. It gave the Irish a 21-6 lead in the third quarter, but Ball State wasn't done.

"Hats off to Ball State," Notre Dame linebacker Drue Tranquill said after making nine stops and securing the victory by recovering an onside kick with 1:30 remaining. "They came here and competed."

Notre Dame outgained Ball State 414-349 but the Cardinals ran off 97 plays to Notre Dame's 72 and controlled the clock for 8:44 more than the Irish.

"There are no moral victories," Ball State coach Mike Neu said. "We had our chance. Our guys were ready to compete. Whatever we lacked in size, we were going to go compete, go toe-to-toe. We embraced the David vs. Goliath comparison."

Following a 46-yard field goal by Justin Yoon that gave the Irish a 24-6 lead going into the fourth quarter, Nolan Givan caught a 10-yard scoring pass from Neal, who threw for 180 yards but completed just 23 of 50 passes. A 49-yard field goal by Ball State's Morgan Hagee, his third of the game, closed out the scoring.

"We have to come together," Elliott said. "Coach Kelly said it best. We play nameless and faceless opponents week to week. Everyone's going to bring their best game so we have to respect our opponents to the fullest."

Junior James Gilbert rushed for 72 yards for Ball State, which outgained Notre Dame on the ground, 169-117. Sophomore Jafar Armstrong led the Irish with 66 yards, including a 42-yard scamper up the middle in the first quarter that he followed with a 1-yard scoring run two plays later. Jones finished with 61 yards.

The Cardinals' 3-4 defense frustrated senior Irish quarterback Brandon Wimbush, who threw for 297 yards but finished with minus 7 yards rushing as Ball State registered four sacks and picked off three of his passes.

"I think we lacked attention to detail and focus, especially in the second half," Wimbush said.

His coach wouldn't put the blame for Notre Dame's offensive ineffectiveness on Wimbush's shoulders.

"Brandon wasn't the reason we were ineffective offensively," Kelly said. "You never want your quarterback to throw three interceptions. We're looking at it as we're anxious to go back to work because we're seeing some things we like."

O-LINE PLAY

Notre Dame center Sam Mustipher was not pleased with the offensive line performance but gave credit to Ball State, which finished with 10 tackles for loss. Linebackers Jaylin Thomas and Jacob White and strong safety had nine tackles each for the Cardinals.

"We didn't execute well," Mustipher said. "I don't even know what grade I would give. They were physical, they were moving, blitzing us, pressuring us. They played well."

DEE-FENSE

Senior middle linebacker Te'von Coney had another big game for Notre Dame, making a team-high 14 tackles, 10 of them solo. He also had Notre Dame's one sack of Neal among his team-high three tackles for loss. Junior cornerback Julian Love, who set a school record with 20 passes broken up last season, finished with four.

THE TAKEAWAY

Ball State: The Cardinals, who have just nine seniors on the roster, showed that they could be a factor in the MAC race after injuries to Neal and Gilbert last year factored into a nine-game losing streak.

Notre Dame: After receiving the game ball following last week's victory, Wimbush couldn't get things going with his feet as the Cardinals closed his running lanes. His longest gain rushing was 9 yards. But the three interceptions were disappointing.

"Three picks," Wimbush said. "I don't give myself an A, a B ... probably a D, a D-plus. You can't throw three interceptions."

POLL IMPLICATIONS

Notre Dame: The Irish, who rose from No. 12 to No. 8 after the win over Michigan, could lose some ground but should remain in the top 10.

Final	1	2	3	4	T
BALL	3	3	0	10	16
ND	7	7	10	0	24

Scoring Summary -----

	BALL	ND
<b>FIRST QUARTER</b>		
ND TD 13:06		
Jafar Armstrong 1 Yd Run (Justin Yoon Kick)		
5 plays, 74 yards, 1:54	0	7
<b>BALL FG 6:17</b>		
Morgan Hagee 25 Yd Field Goal		
19 plays, 85 yards, 6:49	3	7
<b>SECOND QUARTER</b>		
ND TD 8:14		
Tony Jones Jr. 31 Yd Run (Justin Yoon Kick)		
1 play, 31 yards, 0:09	3	14
<b>BALL FG 2:30</b>		
Morgan Hagee 23 Yd Field Goal		
13 plays, 36 yards, 2:55	6	14
<b>THIRD QUARTER</b>		
ND TD 10:37		
Tony Jones Jr. 1 Yd Run (Justin Yoon Kick)		
6 plays, 56 yards, 1:55	6	21
<b>ND FG 2:01</b>		
Justin Yoon 46 Yd Field Goal		
8 plays, 33 yards, 2:30	6	24
<b>FOURTH QUARTER</b>		
BALL TD 12:01		
Nolan Givan 10 Yd pass from Riley Neal (Morgan Hagee Kick)		
13 plays, 79 yards, 5:00	13	24
<b>BALL FG 1:30</b>		
Morgan Hagee 49 Yd Field Goal		
8 plays, 26 yards, 2:21	16	24

Team Stats	BALL	ND
First Downs	24	20
Total Yards	349	414
Total Plays	97	72
Avg Gain Per Play	3.6	5.8
Net Yards Rushing	169	117
Rushes	47	41
Yards Per Rush	3.6	2.9
Net Yards Passing	180	297
Comp-Att	23-50	17-31
Yards Per Pass	3.6	9.6
Times Sacked	1	4
Yds Lost To Sacks	-6	-25
Interceptions	2	3
Punts	7	5
Punt Average	41.6	36.4
Penalties	3	2
Penalty Yards	10	20
Fumbles	0	1
Fumbles Lost	0	0
Possession	34:22	25:38

Individual Stats

RUSHING

BALL	Rush	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
34 James Gilbert	19	72	3.8	13	0
15 Riley Neal	7	35	5.0	12	0
36 Caleb Huntley	12	31	2.6	6	0
4 Malik Dunner	5	23	4.6	12	0
12 Justin Hall	2	6	3.0	3	0
75 Danny Pinter	1	3	3.0	3	0
ND	Rush	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
8 Jafar Armstrong	13	66	5.1	42	1
6 Tony Jones Jr.	13	61	4.7	31	2
3 Avery Davis	2	1	0.5	2	0
7 Brandon Wimbush	11	-7	-0.6	9	0

PASSING

BALL	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
15 Riley Neal	23	50	180	3.6	1	2	74.8
ND	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
7 Brandon Wimbush	17	31	297	9.6	0	3	116.0

RECEIVING

BALL	Rec	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
12 Justin Hall	6	71	11.8	23	0
86 Riley Miller	6	51	8.5	12	0
11 Corey Lacanaria	5	45	9.0	18	0
34 James Gilbert	1	8	8.0	8	0
88 Nolan Givan	2	7	3.5	10	1
36 Caleb Huntley	2	1	0.5	3	0
4 Malik Dunner	1	-3	-3.0	0	0
ND	Rec	Yds	Avg	Long	TD
81 Miles Boykin	6	119	19.8	26	0
8 Jafar Armstrong	3	61	20.3	27	0
10 Chris Finke	2	40	20.0	27	0
83 Chase Claypool	3	36	12.0	23	0
86 Alize Mack	2	23	11.5	18	0
84 Cole Kmet	1	18	18.0	18	0