

BLUE GOLD REPORT

NOV. 14, 2018 ♦ NOTRE DAME VS. SYRACUSE

Game Info

Date: Nov. 17, 2018.

Site: Yankee Stadium (54,251).

Kickoff: 2:30 p.m. ET.

Television: NBC.

Radio: This broadcast can be heard live on SIRIUS Satellite Radio (channel 129) and on Notre Dame's IMG affiliates.

Series Facts: The Irish lead the all-time series 5-3, including winning the last two in 2014 (31-15) and 2016 (50-33) since joining the ACC.

Head Coaches: Syracuse — Dino Babers (16-18, 3rd season); Notre Dame — Brian Kelly (79-34, ninth season).

Noting Syracuse: The Orange will try to make it two straight seasons with a win over a top-five opponent in the state of New York after defeating then-No. 2 Clemson at home on Oct. 13, 2017 ... Syracuse led the ACC and was tied for fourth nationally in turnover margin (plus-12) after 11 weeks ... With their seventh win of the season Nov. 3 (Wake Forest), Syracuse is bowl eligible and has secured its first winning season since 2013 (7-6) ... On Oct. 28, the Orange cracked the national polls for the first time in 17 years — the second longest Power Five Associated Press poll drought behind only Indiana (1994) — and checked in at No. 12 this week for its highest rating since moving to No. 11 on Sept. 28, 1998.

Notre Dame-Syracuse: Another Shootout In The Making?

Lou Somogyi • BlueAndGold.com

The last time Notre Dame and Syracuse met on the gridiron was on Oct. 1, 2016. The 1-3 Fighting Irish, who six days earlier fired defensive coordinator **Brian VanGorder**, won a 50-33 shootout against the Orange at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

Notre Dame rolled up 654 total yards, with quarterback **DeShone Kizer** completing 23 of 35 passes for 471 yards with three touchdowns. Syracuse amassed 489 total yards, with then-sophomore quarterback **Eric Dungey** completing 31 of 51 throws for 363 yards while adding 49 yards and three touchdowns on the ground.

The combined 1,143 yards produced in that game unofficially might be the most in a contest involving the Irish. Also, thanks to a kickoff return for a touchdown by **C.J. Sanders**, the score already was 23-13 with 10:06 left — in the first quarter.

Dungey is back for Syracuse and leads one of the nation's most prolific and up-tempo offenses again during a surprising 8-2 start in which the Orange ranked:

- No. 7 nationally in scoring offense with a 44.4 average. In eight of those 10 games, the Orange tallied at least 40 points. The two they didn't were a 30-7 trouncing of Florida State and a 27-23

loss at No. 2 Clemson — which it had upset a year earlier.

"A lot of similar players from '16 — they're just better," Notre Dame head coach **Brian Kelly** said during his Tuesday press conference. "They're better on the offensive line, they're better on the defensive line."

"The quarterback, obviously, is a veteran player that has seen it all, and a lot of the credit goes to **Dino Babers** for building the program up to where it is, and they deserve to be where they are."

The only other offenses Notre Dame has faced this year that rank among the top 50 in scoring are Michigan at 20th (37.2) and Wake Forest at 44th (31.8).

- No. 14 in total offense at 482.2 yards per game. The beauty of it is the balance displayed with 266.1 passing yards per game (36th in the country) and 216.1 rushing yards per game (27th).

Contrast that to two years ago and that Notre Dame game in Babers' first season when the Orange averaged 321.3 passing yards per contest and only 119.7 rushing yards per game. Last year, it was 294.8 passing and 161.5 rushing. With the threat of the run, more can be achieved in the fast-paced attack.

"The ability to run it equally as well as throw it," Kelly said of another difference of Syracuse this year from two years ago. "They're going to work off how you align defensively, so you have to have a fundamentally designed way of how you are going to play and then go to work off it from there."

Last week against Florida State, one of the worst rushing teams in the country, Notre Dame used nickel package as its base, with **Nick Coleman**, who intercepted a pass on the second play that he returned to the FSU 3-yard line, at nickel. Unlike the Seminoles, though, the Orange is not one-dimensional on offense.

"If you line up in base, you know what they're going to attack," Kelly said. "If you line up in nickel, you know how they're going to attack you."

"So you have to go from that and be able to support the potential weaknesses if from one or the other."

- No. 3 in plays run per game at 84.9, after leading the nation last season with 87.8.

This, however, should not be alien to the Notre Dame defense, as it has already faced up-tempo teams such as Wake Forest, Northwestern and Ball State, the latter running a record 97 plays versus the Irish.

From a scheme standpoint, however, Kelly said the Orange distinguish themselves by the physicality that is displayed by the 6-4, 226-pound Dungey, who has passed for 2,193 yards and 14 touchdowns this year while rushing for 690 yards (second most on the team) and 12 scores.

"[Dungey's] toughness kind of envelopes that entire offense," Kelly stated. "It's not a finesse spread offense. There is a toughness to it, and I think it comes from him. ... Great intangibles, great leadership."

Whereas Wake Forest runs tempo at a faster pace than Syracuse, the Orange presents other problems.

“They do a good job with their cadence, trying to get you offsides, which gives them a lot of free shots, so you have to be disciplined,” Kelly said. “You have to have great communication at all three levels. ... We’ve played tempo teams, so that’s not going to be a reason why they win the football game. It can be a reason why we give up big plays if we’re not on top of things.”

The combination of excellent experience with Dungey and along the offensive line also has helped elevate the performance of the running back and receiver units. **Moe Neal** is the top rusher with 712 yards to complement Dungey, and the rebuilt receiving corps features top pass catcher **Sean Riley** and **Jamal Custis**.

Kelly said Neal — who also leads the nation in punt return average with 17.4 on 13 returns — reminds him of Wake Forest standout **Greg Dortch**. Meanwhile, Custis’ 42 catches average a robust 17.4 yards.

“One of the things they’ve done well is they’ve upgraded at the running back position to the level where they’ve got some home-run threats,” Kelly said. “... They’ve got a tight end now that can help them in the running game.”

With Dungey and all the veterans up front, Kelly compared it to facing the triple option of Navy in that nothing is going to be foreign to them.

“You try to come up with a scheme against it, they’ve seen it, so you better be fundamentally sound,” Kelly said. “You better do what you do really well, because they’re going to do what they do.”

Notre Dame’s offense also became more productive after junior quarterback **Ian Book**, who ranked No. 1 nationally in completion percentage (74.5) and is now No. 4 in pass efficiency (170.0 rating, behind only Oklahoma’s **Kyle Murray**, Alabama’s **Tua Tagovailoa** and West Virginia’s **Will Grier**), ran it from games four through nine. The Irish averaged 38.8 points per outing in the six games with Book after producing only 23.3 in the first three contests when he did not start.

Even without the injured Book last week, **Brandon Wimbush** and Co. put up 42 points versus Florida State to elevate the season average to 39.3. Per Kelly, Book was cleared by the medical staff to return to practice this week, and therefore would be the starter.

“He went through all of the workouts [on Monday], threw the ball, he was in the weight room,” Kelly said. “He’ll practice today for the first time.”

When asked if he would need to evaluate Book this week in practice to see whether or not he is available for Syracuse, Kelly was affirmative.

“Not really,” he replied. “We’re pretty clear that he’s ready to play.”

In this potential shootout, every available bullet helps.

Syracuse Ignoring Outside Noise Leading Into Matchup With Notre Dame

Corey Bodden • BlueAndGold.com

Syracuse will face a top-four opponent away from the Carrier Dome for the second time this season, when it travels to the Bronx, N.Y., to take on Notre Dame at Yankee Stadium.

The Orange nearly upset then-No. 3 Clemson on the road Sept. 29, leading for much of the game and holding a lead with less than two minutes to go before falling 27-23.

Another test awaits head coach **Dino Babers** and company in the form of the current No. 3 team in the country. The Fighting Irish defense is the best unit the Orange have faced since the Tigers, who held the Orange to just 311 total yards (61 on the ground).

Notre Dame currently ranks 25th in total defense (330.1 yards allowed per game) and 15th in scoring (18.7 points allowed per game) heading into the top-15 matchup with Syracuse.

“Their defense is doing really, really well,” Babers said of the Irish. “Their new coordinator, **Clark Lea**, I believe used to work here and I knew him when he was one of our graduate assistants at UCLA before he became full-time. He’s doing a fabulous job with that defense that **Mike Elko** handed down to him, who is now at Texas A&M, which both of them started at Wake Forest the first year we played them.

“I have some knowledge of it, but the players they are playing with on defense are really, really good and really, really long, and they have a really, really good scheme. It’s the main reason why I’m sure a lot of teams had a lot of difficulty scoring points.”

The Fighting Irish offense, which is averaging 453.7 total yards (26th) and 34.5 points (30th) per game, is set to get back junior quarterback Ian Book after a one-week hiatus due to injury. Book has thrown for 1,824 yards with 15 touchdowns and four interceptions this season.

“The offense is so good,” Babers said. “You’re trying to match suit with them and then before you know it, you’re behind and then the floodgates open and the game is over. You’ve got to kind of find a way to see if you can get into the second half, and get into the third and fourth quarter and make it a tight game.

“I think they’ve been playing really loose, but they’ve normally had leads and comfortable leads, so their players could play loose.”

Babers and the Orange are ignoring the noise about this Saturday being one of the biggest games in program history over the past decade-plus. The head coach does feel his team is in a better spot at multiple positions in comparison to the last time the two programs met in 2016, a 50-33 Irish victory.

“We’ve played on TV before,” Babers said. “The stage is no different than playing in Clemson’s stadium or playing in some of the other stadiums we’ve played in. I’m not sure. ... We’re probably in a better situation than we were in two years ago.

“... I think the teams are different, and I think the stage is different. We’re going to have to see

if we've matured enough to handle the situation."

A win by Syracuse against the Irish would give the program its first nine-win season since a 10-3 finish in 2001.

"I don't see this like one of the biggest games since 2001," Babers said when asked if Saturday was like any other game for the Orange. "I think about the Virginia Tech game being a conference game, two years ago the Clemson game being a conference game, one year ago the Clemson game being a conference game, this year how valuable the Pitt game is.

"To me, this is like a freebie. We're 4-0 in the second part of the season and we have a non-conference opponent and we're playing them. It doesn't effect our conference standings, but it does effect our overall record, so I look at this one a little bit different than our conference games."

Brian Kelly Previews Syracuse

Corey Bodden • BlueAndGold.com

The Notre Dame defense will face arguably its toughest test so far in 2018, when it squares off with a potent Syracuse offense at Yankee Stadium on Saturday.

The Orange rank 14th nationally in total yards per game (482.2), which is the highest of any current Notre Dame opponent so far through 11 weeks. Wake Forest (32nd) and Virginia Tech (44th) are the others inside the top 50 nationally.

Head coach **Dino Babers'** group has been balanced thus far, ranking 27th in rushing (216.1 yards per game) and 36th in passing (266.1) while averaging 44.4 points per contest (seventh nationally). Babers and company will look to go fast and spread the Irish out on Saturday afternoon.

"This is somebody that has had success as a head coach," **Brian Kelly** said of Babers. "You can see that starting to show itself in its third year, and that is a consistency in his approach and player development.

"They haven't changed who they are. They are who they are. They've stayed the course. They've had to avoid the noise of is this going to work, and they've developed their players."

The offense is led by senior quarterback **Eric Dungey**, who has accounted for 2,883 yards of total offense (2,193 passing and 690 rushing) and 26 touchdowns (14 passing and 12 rushing) with just five interceptions this season.

"Four-year starter with Dungey, he's a guy that does a lot of great things for them," Kelly said. "Not only does he run the offense, he's fearless. The guy's fearless as a player. He's big, he's strong.

"Play breaks down, he's scoring on the run. And certainly can throw the football extremely well. Again, a four-year starter who has seen it all. He's got great intangibles, great leadership."

Dungey certainly has support in the backfield as well with junior running back **Moe Neal** (117 attempts for 712 yards and five touchdowns), senior running back **Dontae Strickland** (84 rushes for 381 yards and six touchdowns) and freshman running back **Jarveon Howard** (60 carries for 298 yards and six touchdowns).

"I think one of the things they've done well is they've upgraded at the running back position to the level where they've got some home-run threats," Kelly stated. "Moe Neal, Dontae Strickland, big downhill guy. Really have done a nice job there."

The big-play potential continues out wide at the receiver position with fifth-year senior **Jamal Custis** (42 catches for 748 yards and five touchdowns) and junior **Sean Riley** (54 receptions for 603 yards and two touchdowns) leading the way.

"Sean Riley reminds me of **Greg Dortch** at Wake Forest with great speed and is a home-run guy and special teams when he touches the football," Kelly said. "Custis is a great matchup guy. I think he's averaging 17 yards per catch on the notes that I have here, and [freshman] Taj Harris, is a 6-foot-3 guy.

"So plenty of players to surround Dungey and an offensive line that's veteran."

When Notre Dame last saw Syracuse, a 50-33 Irish win in 2016, the Orange ranked as one of the worst defenses in the country. Babers' group finished that season 122nd in total defense (501.1 yards allowed per game) and 120th in scoring defense (38.6 points allowed per game).

Two years later, the Orange have improved in both areas — ranking 97th in total defense (430.3) and 70th in scoring defense (27.6).

"We've seen a difference in this defense in a very, very short period of time, and it starts with the defensive ends [juniors **Alton Robinson** (9.0 sacks) and **Kendall Coleman** (7.0 sacks)]. Two guys that can legitimately come off the edge and rush the passer and then an inside guy in [fifth-year senior] **Chris Slayton** [3.5 sacks] that does a really good job with his hands, gets off blocks.

"Linebackers are young, but they're playing really well. I think [senior] **Ryan Guthrie** [77 tackles] at the Mike is playing downhill, extremely athletic. They lost a lot of linebackers last year, and that group's emerging.

"The secondary, they played a lot of guys back there. [Redshirt junior] **Chris Frederick** is a really good boundary corner that can play man-to-man, and [they] got a lot of depth back there."

Syracuse enters Saturday on a four-game winning streak following its lone two defeats against Clemson (27-23) and Pittsburgh (44-37), the two teams that could end up playing each other in the ACC championship game.

2020 Athlete Caleb Willis Enjoys Second Notre Dame Trip

David McKinney • BlueAndGold.com

Notre Dame hosted a huge list of recruits from all over the country on Saturday, including 2020 athlete Caleb Willis from Jackson (Tenn.) University School. Willis visited South Bend for the first time last month and was eager to return once he left.

“It was great,” Willis said of this weekend’s visit. “It was like I was at home again. I liked this one even better.”

The junior said getting back to Notre Dame for a second game this season was a priority for him because he loved it so much the first time.

“I wanted to make sure it’s one of my top schools,” Willis said. “I’ve visited different places, and you want to visit again to make sure you get the same feeling you got the first time.

“I had a great time the first time, so why not go again?”

Willis is listed by Rivals as an athlete, but Notre Dame seems to see running back in his future.

According to Willis, he spoke mostly with running backs coach Autry Denson over the weekend, which he said was a great experience.

“We talked about football some, but we also talked about faith,” Willis said. “He talked to me about how his ministry is his number one job. He uses football to increase his ministry.

“I liked it because when I talk to some coaches, it’s all football.”

Of course, the highlight of the weekend was getting to see Notre Dame’s blowout 42-13 win over Florida State in person.

Willis said getting to be inside Notre Dame Stadium on senior night was something he won’t forget.

“I liked that a lot,” Willis said. “The atmosphere was great. The whole crowd was crazy and it was a great night game.”

Currently, Willis holds just one offer from Memphis.

Notre Dame told him this weekend that they’ll be keeping an eye on him going forward.

“They told me they like my film and to keep working academically,” Willis said.

If an offer from Notre Dame ever does come, Willis said he’d be fired up.

“That would mean a lot,” Willis said. “That’s a really great program and it would really mean a lot.”

BLUE GOLD

Join the Rivals community! Subscribe

Home Forums Football Basketball Recruiting More Prospect Search Teams

FB

NEXT Sat, Nov 17, 2:30 PM EST

LAST 13

Final

RESULTS Overall 10-0

Full Schedule

BB

SYR

ND

(8-2)

(10-0)

FSU

ND

42

All Football Basketball Other

Follow

Inside Look: Defensive Line vs. Florida State

4h Bryan Driskell

Rivals100 DB Enzo Jennings Talks Notre Dame Visit

4h Josh Helmholz

Syracuse Ignoring Outside Noise Leading Into Matchup With Notre Dame

3h Corey Boddem

Snap Counts: Notre Dame vs. Florida State

4h Bryan Driskell

Notre Dame & Syracuse Benefit From November Healthy Surge

4h Leo Songanyi

The Other Sideline Podcast Talking Syracuse With Ryan Murray

3h Corey Boddem

Brian Kelly Previews Syracuse

3h Corey Boddem

Rockne's Roundtable | BGI Podcasts

News

Join now!

Be a part of the BlueAndGold.com community for \$8.33/month.

Subscribe

TICKER

BLUEANDGOLD.COM

2021 OL Jackson Walls Hoping For Notre Dame Offer After Visit

7H AGO

BLUEANDGOLD.COM

Inside The CFP Rankings: Week 12

8H AGO

BLUEANDGOLD.COM

HOOPS Preview: Notre Dame vs. Radford

9H AGO

BLUEANDGOLD.COM

Notre Dame Remains No. 3 In College Football Playoff Rankings

20H AGO

BLUEANDGOLD.COM

2020 DE Julien Logan-Redding Has Great Second Visit To Notre Dame

21H AGO

BLUEANDGOLD.COM

Mike Brey Notebook: Nov. 13

21H AGO

BLUEANDGOLD.COM

Notre Dame Commit Tracker: Week 12

1D AGO

HOLY CROSS

VILLAGE AT NOTRE DAME

RETIRE CLOSER TO THE GAME

(574) 251-2235

JOIN THE DISCUSSION

11/14/2018 DavidMcKinney

Snap Counts: Notre Dame v- Florida State

19m dhigduhcheck

41

2186

11/14/2018 Bryan Driskell

Inside the Rankings: Week 13

3m BC3ND

10

179

More

GALLERY

Notre Dame vs. Florida State

11/13/18 - 11 photos

Notre Dame at Northwestern

11/9/18 - 10 photos

More

2018 Schedule & Results

Football

Basketball

Next Game

Sat, Nov 17, 2:30 PM EST

Syracuse

Orange

8-2

Notre Dame

Fighting Irish

10-0

Last Game

Final

Florida State

Seminoles

13

Notre Dame

Fighting Irish

42

Results

10-0

Overall

Full Schedule

2019 Commitment List

Football

Basketball

Name

Pos

Stars

Howard Cross III

DE

★★★★★

Hunter Spears

DE

★★★★★

Isaiah Rutherford

DB

★★★★★

Jacob Lacey

DT

★★★★★

John Olmstead

OL

★★★★★

Kyle Hamilton

DB

★★★★★

Litchfield Ajajon

DB

★★★★★

NaNa Osafo-Mensah

DE

★★★★★

Osita Ekwonu

LB

★★★★★

Quinn Carroll

OL

★★★★★

Zeke Correll

OL

★★★★★

Andrew Kristofic

OL

★★★★★

Brendon Clark

QB

★★★★★

Cam Hart

ATH

★★★★★

See More

Blue & Gold

A Twitter list by @BGINews

The staff of Blue & Gold Illustrated and BlueAndGold.com

David McKinney Retweeted

NaNa Osafo-Mensah

@NaNaOsafo2

My All-American jersey presentation will t Catholic tomorrow at 10:00am. All our we come, I'd truly appreciate all the love #3e

Embed

Vi

About Privacy Policy Copyright/IP Policy Contact Us Terms of Service Member Services

BLUE GOLD REPORT ♦ BLUEGOLDONLINE.COM ♦ 800-421-7751

4