

BLUE GOLD REPORT

NOV. 21, 2018 ♦ NOTRE DAME AT USC

Game Info

Date: Nov. 24, 2018.

Site: Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum (78,467).

Kickoff: 8 p.m. ET.

Television: ABC.

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 series 47-37-5 after claiming five of the last eight games between the two programs. This will be the 90th all-time meeting between the two programs.

Head Coaches: USC — Clay Helton (32-16, 3rd season); Notre Dame — Brian Kelly (80-34, ninth season).

Noting USC: The Trojans are looking for their third straight win against Notre Dame in Los Angeles, with the previous two coming by an average of 26.5 points ... The last time USC didn't finish the regular season above .500 was a 6-6 mark in 2001 ... Over the past five seasons, including 2018, USC is 5-7 against Power Five non-conference opponents ... This season is the first since 2008 that the Trojans had to replace their statistical leading passer, rusher and receiver from the previous season ... USC had to find replacements for its first-ever 4,000-yard passer in a season, a back-to-back 1,000-yard rusher, and a pair of wide receivers who combined for 127 receptions, 1,758 receiving yards and 13 touchdowns in 2017.

Brian Kelly Previews USC

By Corey Bodden

Following last week's impressive 36-3 win over a ranked Syracuse team in New York, Notre Dame is one game away from finishing a perfect regular season.

Of course, that is not the focus for head coach **Brian Kelly** and the Irish. Instead, they are simply concerned with continuing to improve as a team.

"We'll do what we've done each and every week," Kelly stated on Tuesday. "All that sounds really intimidating and imposing, but we'll focus on what we need to do to prepare our football team.

"As I mentioned at the outset, we have some things we need to work on. That will be our focus this week, what we need to do to be successful this weekend."

A hated rival — Southern California — stands in the way between Notre Dame and a berth in the College Football Playoff.

The last time the Fighting Irish traveled to Los Angeles for the regular-season finale with an 11-0 record in 2012, they earned a spot in the BCS National Championship game versus Alabama with a 22-13 win over the Trojans.

USC, however, has been trending in the wrong direction this season after accomplishing

back-to-back 10-win seasons in 2016 and 2017. Although the Trojans rank just 93rd in total yards per game (377.1) and are tied for 82nd in points per game (26.9), Kelly is aware of the potential dangers that unit could provide his team's defense.

Freshman signal-caller **JT Daniels** is leading the charge for the Trojans, and has thrown for 2,312 yards with 13 touchdowns and 10 interceptions through 11 games. USC has created some explosive plays in the passing game with junior wide receiver **Michael Pittman** (33 receptions for 656 yards and six touchdowns), freshman wideout **Amon-Ra St. Brown** (50 catches for 656 yards and three scores) and redshirt sophomore wide receiver **Tyler Vaughns** (47 grabs for 554 yards and five touchdowns).

Senior tailback **Aca'Cedric Ware** (112 rushes for 757 yards and six scores) and sophomore tailback **Vavae Malepeai** (89 rushes for 480 yards and seven touchdowns) will be head coach **Clay Helton**'s top two options in the run game.

"When you look at the skill players that they have, Vaughns, Pittman, St. Brown and Jones [there is cause for concern]," Kelly said. "In the backfield, Ware has been really good. JT Daniels, a freshman who has incredible arm talent, very smart quarterback.

"So it's a big-play-potential offense. They can make plays all over the field. They had a great win over Washington State, one of the top teams in the country."

Defensively, USC has been a little bit better by ranking 56th in total yards allowed per game (379.9) and 69th in points allowed per contest (27.3).

"I have a lot of respect for defensive coordinator **Clancy Pendergast**," Kelly said. "He knows defense, has been in this business. He knows how to get his guys in good position structurally.

"[Senior] linebacker Cam Smith is a tough, hard-nosed, physical kid. He's been around a while, battled through injuries, keeps coming back. I have a lot of respect for him. [Senior] cornerback **Iman Marshall** in the defensive backfield. Highly recruited players that are really good football players.

"Playing there is never easy, so we have to go across the country and play a team that obviously has a lot of potential."

Kelly was asked if he saw any similarities between his 2016 team that finished 4-8 and faced a top-25 USC team to this current USC team.

"The only similarity that I would see with this team is maybe the 2014 team in terms of injuries on the defensive side of the ball," Kelly noted. "They've been ravaged by injuries defensively. You have a lot of injuries on defense, then a really young quarterback who's going to be really, really good.

"Those two things ... they've been in really some close games, haven't been able to turn them their way."

With no conference championship game to face the following week and a prime-time slot, many eyes will be on Notre Dame Saturday night to see if one spot in the College Football Playoff essentially becomes locked up.

Notre Dame-USC: Two Years Later

By Lou Somogyi

What an astounding difference two years can make.

At this time two years ago, Notre Dame head coach **Brian Kelly** was 4-7 while USC's **Clay Helton** was in the midst of a nine-game winning streak that would help USC finish No. 3 in the country.

Two years later this same week, it is Kelly's 11-0 Fighting Irish that are ranked No. 3 after that 4-8 debacle, while Helton's reeling Trojans have lost four of their last five, including 34-27 last week to a then 2-8 UCLA team. This time it is Helton who is deemed the "dead coach walking" with a 5-6 ledger. A loss to Notre Dame would give Troy its first losing campaign since 2000, when the Irish ended their misery with a 38-21 victory to cap a 5-7 campaign that turned out to be **Paul Hackett's** last game as USC's head coach.

However, Kelly doesn't believe the 2016 comparison is fitting. He says it might be more like what Notre Dame was in 2014 when it traveled to Los Angeles having also lost four of its last five games (including three in a row), and possessing a decimated defense overwhelmed by injuries. So thin were the Irish that freshman tackle **Jay Hayes**, who was redshirted the first 10 games, had to be inserted into the lineup the final two weeks.

USC lost top cornerback **Jack Jackson**, who led the 2017 unit in interceptions, when he was dismissed from school in the preseason. A season-ending injury in October to standout linebacker **Porter Gustin** was another significant setback. Another star linebacker, **Cameron Smith**, has battled knee and hamstring injuries, while a third, **John Houston**, was injured last week in the loss to the Bruins. Also in October, star freshman safety **Talanoa Hufanga** suffered a broken collarbone that shelved him for the season, and that position in particular is down to the bare ones.

"They've been ravaged by injuries defensively," Kelly said. "You have a lot of injuries on defense, then a really young quarterback [**J.T. Daniels**] who's going to be really, really good. Those two things ... they've been in really some close games, haven't been able to turn them their way."

The offense likewise has been besieged by its share of injuries, including top rusher **Aca'Cedric Ware** (shoulder, suffered versus UCLA) and senior right tackle **Chuma Edoga**.

USC signed elite five-star quarterback prospect Daniels, but he is somewhat experiencing a similar baptism of fire that Notre Dame's **Jimmy Clausen** — also a No. 1 QB recruit from California — did during a 3-9 season his freshman year in 2007.

"He's incredibly talented," Kelly said of Daniels. "But [former USC star] **Sam Darnold**, he's playing in the NFL, so there's a difference between those two quarterbacks. I think Daniels, one day, he's going to be playing in the NFL, too."

Naturally, in such situations the head coach will be taking the heat. A GoFundMe page has been created for the ouster of Helton, which includes carrying a banner by plane over the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

Said the page: "1. The first goal is to raise \$2,000 in order to rent a plane to pull an aerial

banner over the USC campus on 11/24/18 before the Notre Dame vs USC game that will call for Clay Helton's firing. 2. The second goal would be to raise an additional \$20,000 for a full page ad in the *LA Times*, also calling for Clay Helton's firing and about \$1,000 to cover the fees associated with using GoFundMe if we reach the full goal. This ad will run as soon as the money is raised and the *LA Times* can logistically run the advertisement."

During this decade, it seems every time Notre Dame plays USC the Trojans' head football coach is on the hot seat. In nine seasons at Notre Dame, Kelly has already faced four different USC head coaches, the most ever by any Fighting Irish boss.

First, it was **Lane Kiffin** (2010-13) who was dismissed prior to the halfway mark in 2013. **Ed Orgeron** took on the interim role for the Trojans, but it was former Trojans assistant and Washington head coach **Steve Sarkisian** who was hired as the head coach in 2014.

After Sarkisian was ousted midway through 2015, Helton took over. Unlike Orgeron two years earlier, he was hired as the head coach moving forward.

The initial groundswell of discontent and skepticism with Helton, who was perceived to be "out of his league," was when his 2016 campaign debuted with a 52-6 loss to Alabama and a 1-3 start.

The Trojans then won their final nine games, capped by a 45-27 win versus Notre Dame and a thrilling 52-49 triumph over Penn State in the Rose Bowl to finish No. 3 in the final Associated Press poll — the highest ever by a three-loss team.

Then in 2017, for the first time since 2007/08, USC produced back-to-back seasons with at least 10 victories, highlighted by its first Pac12 conference championship since 2008. The Trojans defeated Stanford 31-28 in the Pac-12 title game after having also defeated the Cardinal 42-24 in the second game of the season.

Although the final record of 113 looked better on paper than the 103 result in 2016, it was a little less fulfilling at the end despite the league title.

Last year, in addition to the 49-14 trouncing at Notre Dame, the Trojans were physically manhandled in a 24-7 loss to Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl to finish No. 12 in the AP poll, one spot behind the Irish.

Once again, questions resurfaced on whether Helton possessed the coaching traits to restore the Trojans' dominance that was experienced under **John McKay** (1960-75), **John Robinson** (1976-82) and **Pete Carroll** (2001-09).

To many, Helton has become this generation's version of **Larry Smith**, who led USC to three consecutive Rose Bowls from 1987-89 (although never defeating Notre Dame), before badly faltering from 1990-92.

This season, home losses to Arizona State (Oct. 27) and Cal (Nov. 10) only intensified rumblings nationally that Helton might follow Louisville's **Bobby Petrino** as the next head coach to get the ax. The loss to the Sun Devils also resulted in a chain reaction effect that included the firing of offensive line coach **Neil Callaway**, stripping offensive coordinator **Tee Martin** of his play-calling duties (reportedly now belonging to Helton) and the dreaded public vote of confidence from athletics director **Lynn Swann**.

“I believe in him,” Swann said of Helton during a segment on Trojans Live three days after the loss to Arizona State. “I like the position that he takes. He is passionate about what he does. He is honest and real in what he wants to accomplish and how he wants to accomplish it. There is no false chatter.”

“My main heartbreak is for our seniors, because I wanted it for them,” Helton said following last week’s demoralizing defeat to UCLA. “I know the job. The job is if you win, people are going to pat you on the back, and if you lose, you know they’re going to get after you. If you don’t like it, don’t be in this profession. I know it. It rolls off my back, so I’m not worried about it.

“I work my butt off every 24 hours to try to buy another 24. If you work as hard as you can and do the best job you can for your kids and for the university you love, you have no regrets, and I don’t. I’ll continue to work as hard as humanly possible. I’ve got great support from USC, from Lynn Swann and from these kids, and I owe it to them to work as hard as I can for them.”

Earlier this year, Helton’s contract was extended through the 2023 campaign after winning a school-record 21 games his first two years.

What a difference a few years, even months, weeks and days, can make.

The screenshot shows the BlueAndGold.com website. At the top is a navigation bar with links: Home, Forums, Football, Basketball, Recruiting, More, Prospect Search, Teams. Below the navigation bar is a grid of featured articles. The main article is 'Inside The CFP Rankings: Week 13' by Bryan Driskell. Other articles include 'Brian Kelly Previews USC', 'Notre Dame-USC: Two Years Later', '2020 OL Tyler Miller Impressed With Notre Dame Following Visit', 'Snap Counts: Notre Dame vs. Syracuse', 'Rivals 100 LB Kalel Mullings Discusses Shamrock Series Trip', and 'Quick Hits: Notre Dame's 67-56 Win Over Duquesne'. Below the grid is a 'Join now!' button and a 'Subscribe now!' button. On the left is a 'TICKER' section with a list of recent news items. On the right is a 'JOIN THE DISCUSSION' section with a list of forum threads. At the bottom is a 'GALLERY' section with a list of images. A large yellow starburst banner in the center reads: 'Start Your FREE 30-DAY TRIAL Today! Use Code: BGI30'.

The Irish And Trojans ‘Best Of 11’ Tiebreaker

By Lou Somogyi

For an amazing 11th time, the Notre Dame football program will enter the regular-season finale at the Los Angeles Coliseum unbeaten.

Five times it came out unscathed, with four helping result in a consensus national title. Five others resulted either in the anguish of defeat, or a tie that ended perfection.

From **Knute Rockne** to **Brian Kelly**, the best-of-11 tiebreaker in such encounters awaits this weekend.

First, the thrill of victory: 1930, 1947, 1966, 1988 and 2012.

1930: Notre Dame 27, USC 0

In what would be his final game, Rockne’s 9-0 Fighting Irish clinched their second straight national title, third overall, and extended their winning streak to 19, with the surprising white-wash of a powerful 8-1 Trojans outfit that had outscored its opponents 372-39 and would capture the national title the ensuing year.

1947: Notre Dame 38, USC 7

Just like in 1929-30, the 8-0 and No. 1-ranked Irish crushed No. 3 and 7-0-1 USC to clinch a second consecutive national title, this time with Rockne protégé **Frank Leahy** as the head coach.

1966: Notre Dame 51, USC 0

The No. 1 and 8-0-1 Irish wrapped up the national title under third-year head coach **Ara Parseghian** with what remains the largest margin of defeat ever by a Trojans team, which was ranked No. 10. The ensuing year USC would win its own national title (just like in 1931 after getting shut out at home by the Irish the previous year).

1988: Notre Dame 27, USC 10

In their lone meeting ever when both teams were 10-0 and ranked No. 1 (Notre Dame) and No. 2 (USC), head coach **Lou Holtz** became the fifth football coach at the school to finish unbeaten and/or win the national title in his third season, although he had to wait to clinch it in the Fiesta Bowl versus West Virginia.

2012: Notre Dame 22, USC 13

In his third season as well, Kelly put himself in position to become the sixth coach at Notre Dame to finish No. 1 and/or go unbeaten his third year when his top-ranked 11-0 Irish defeated the 7-4 Trojans. The “Dream Regular Season” died in the BCS National Championship Game versus Alabama.

And now, the agony of defeat (or tie): 1938, 1948, 1964, 1970 and 1980.

1938: USC 13, Notre Dame 0

Fifth-year head coach **Elmer Layden** had been 3-0-1 versus USC, and all his No. 1 and 8-0 Irish needed was this win versus 7-2 USC to seal the national title. It was not to be.

1948: USC 14, Notre Dame 14

This verdict kept Notre Dame at No. 2 with a 9-0-1 finish. This draw also snapped a 20-game Notre Dame winning streak. An Irish victory here, followed by a 10-0 finish in 1949 and 1-0 start in 1950 would have extended it to a school-record 33 games.

1964: USC 20, Notre Dame 17

First-year head coach Parseghian's Cinderella 9-0 and No. 1 Irish (2-7 the year prior) led 17-0 at halftime ... and then lost in a vale of tears and officiating controversy after USC scored the game winner on a fourth-down pass with 1:33 left.

1970: USC 38, Notre Dame 28

The 9-0 and No. 4-ranked Irish had already been matched up with 10-0 and No. 1 Texas in the Cotton Bowl, and the expectation was it would be for the national title after it would dispatch a reeling 5-4-1 USC team that lost 45-20 to UCLA the previous week.

Instead, the Irish committed eight turnovers to USC's zero to nullify **Joe Theismann's** 526 passing yards in a monsoon. Notre Dame ended up upsetting Texas (24-11) — but finished No. 2 to unbeaten Nebraska because of the loss to the Trojans.

1980: USC 20, Notre Dame 3

Just like 10 years earlier, the 9-0-1 and No. 2 Irish already had accepted an invitation to play No. 1 Georgia in the Sugar Bowl, but first needed to get by USC to play for the title.

Like in 1970 as well, USC had lost the previous week to UCLA. It also had a two-game losing streak.

Alas, "The Wailing Wall" of Notre Dame football, a.k.a. the L.A. Coliseum, struck again.

It should also be noted that the 7-0-1 Irish won at USC in 1953 (48-14) — but that was not the regular-season finale.

Meanwhile, the 1974 unit that was 9-1 still had a shot at the national title and led USC 24-0 with seconds left in the first half ... before one of the most amazing momentum shifts in athletics history saw the Trojans win 55-24 and later capture a share of No. 1 with Oklahoma.

Just as significant in this year's "tiebreaker" in which a win would allow Notre Dame to compete for the national title again in the postseason is snapping a school-record five-game losing streak in the regular-season finale (2013-17).

It couldn't happen at a better place to help erase bitter memories, or add to past celebrations.

Rivals100 ATH Kristian Story Ready To See Notre Dame

By David McKinney

Notre Dame will host a long list of recruits this weekend, including 2020 Rivals100 athlete of Lanett (Ala.) High.

Story, the No. 7 athlete and No. 89 overall player in the class of 2020 per Rivals, can't wait to see Notre Dame up close.

"I'm very excited," Story said. "Notre Dame has great tradition, and I'm really looking forward to seeing what they have to offer."

In recent weeks, Story has been communicating with the Irish recruiting staff and was eager to make the trip once he was invited to see a game.

"I've been talking with the recruiting personnel people, and they've been trying to get me up there," Story explained. "When I talked to my dad about it, we got it together."

Story committed to Tennessee in March, but backed off his pledge Sept. 4. Moving forward, he said he'll be looking for a place where he sees success. Notre Dame, he noted, is one of those places.

"They win year in and year out," Story said. "They rarely have a down year. I'm a winner, so I want go somewhere we're going to win."

Story will be on campus to watch Notre Dame host Florida State, and even though FSU is having a down year, the four-star said is eager to watch the two historical programs do battle.

"I'm really looking forward to seeing what the game-day atmosphere is like," he said.

Beyond that, Story said he'll be looking at a few other factors.

"I look for academics first," he said. "My parents and I are really tough on academics. Second, I look for how well I fit in a program and what type of impact I can make."

Heading into the visit, Story holds offers from several top programs, including Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, Tennessee and Nebraska, among others.

If Notre Dame eventually joins that list, Story said the Irish will definitely be a factor in his recruitment.

"That would be a really big offer for me," he said. "If they do offer me, they'll jump in the mix really fast."