

TIGHT ENDS

Junior Tommy Tremble displayed similar future star power as a sophomore last year (16 catches for 183 yards and four scores) that Cole Kmet did as a 2018 sophomore (15 catches for 162 yards and no scores).

During his 2017-19 stint as Notre Dame's offensive coordinator, Chip Long also coached the tight ends, and it's not a coincidence the position was highly active under his direction.

In head coach Brian Kelly's first four seasons (2010-13), the tight ends, led by Tyler Eifert, were highly productive pass receivers.

But in 2014, the catch totals at the position dropped to 31 for 324 yards, 20 for 233 in 2015 and 12 for 159 during the 4-8 finish in 2016.

With Long's arrival in 2017, those numbers elevated significantly: 45 for 476 in 2017, 56 for 544 in 2018 and 63 for 755 last season.

New coordinator Tommy Rees placed a premium on tight ends in his days as a quarterback during those 2010-13 seasons, and having an Eifert and Troy Niklas helped.

Because there is not a consistent proven wideout and the continued excellent recruiting at tight end, there should not be a huge drop-off at the position, although it might not be quite the level it was last year. Tremble could double his output from the previous year the way Kmet did (and even nearly tripled it) in 2019.

Because Notre Dame features double-tight-end alignments routinely, Mayer next fall could have an impact, but freshman help now is seen as more luxury than necessity.



TOMMY TREMBLE

PHOTO BY MIKE MILLER

BGI Editor
Lou Somogyi's Take

"Because Tommy Tremble established himself as a difficult coverage matchup with his speed, his run blocking became overshadowed. Pro Football Focus graded him out with a strong 82.8 figure in 2019. Starter Cole Kmet was at 55.3, but he also had more than double the snaps (707 to 316)."

POSITION BATTLE TO WATCH

Who can best complement Tommy Tremble?

Much attention has been placed on the incoming freshmen tandem of Michael Mayer and Kevin Bauman, mainly because Mayer's No. 36 overall national ranking by Rivals is the highest by an incoming Fighting Irish tight end since Kyle Rudolph (No. 20) in 2008.

Yet neither rookie enrolled early, and it's easy to forget that senior Brock Wright was Rivals' highest-rated Notre Dame national recruit (No. 44) in 2017, while junior four-star 2018 recruit Takacs would be a starter at many Power Five schools.

WHO'S GONE

Cole Kmet

A strong 2019 with 43 catches for 515 yards and six touchdowns prompted him to turn pro as a junior, and he could be the top tight end selected.

WHO'S BACK

Junior Tommy Tremble

Started seven times in multiple tight end sets, snaring 16 passes for 183 yards and four scores — plus graded out a solid 82.8 by Pro Football Focus as a run blocker, much higher than Kmet.

Senior Brock Wright

Primarily a blocker in short-yardage situations, he played in all 13 games last season (two starts) while totaling 148 snaps.

Junior George Takacs

After redshirting in 2018, took 55 snaps as a sophomore, highlighted by a late, leaping touchdown reception in the 38-7 win at Duke.

TIGHT ENDS COACH

John McNulty — 1st year

Now entering his 30th year of coaching, with 15 in the NFL, McNulty (see more on page 18) is the successor to Chip Long at coaching the position group. His lone previous experience with this specific area was in the NFL from 2016-17.



BY THE NUMBERS

11 Touchdown catches by tight ends last year — six by Cole Kmet, four by Tommy Tremble and one by George Takacs — to break the single-season school record of eight set in 2013. Last year also marked the third consecutive season three different tight ends scored.

63 Receptions hauled in by the tight ends last season that totaled 755 yards (12.0 yards per catch) and the 11 scores. That was just short of the school-record 66 catches at the position in 2011 — with 63 by future first-round pick Tyler Eifert.

2003 Was the most recent season in which the opening day starting tight end at Notre Dame was not drafted by the NFL. Since then it's been Anthony Fasano (2004-05), John Carlson (2006-07) and Kyle Rudolph (2008-10) each in the second round, Eifert (2011-12) in the first round, Troy Niklas (2013) in the second, Ben Koyack (2014) in the seventh, Durham Smythe (2015-17) in the fourth and Alizé Mack (2018) in the seventh. This spring, Kmet (2019) will be next.