

Weis doesn't want Irish to settle for 'nice'

By TOM COYNE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS

Notre Dame is a nice, solid team.

That's how coach Charlie Weis described the Fighting Irish after their 41-14 loss Wednesday night to LSU in the Sugar Bowl. He wasn't being complimentary.

"You want to be an upper echelon team," he said. "You don't want to be just a solid team. You want to be a team competing for a national championship. That just won't cut it with how this ended."

How it ended was the Irish (10-3) losing their NCAA-record ninth straight bowl game, giving up a season-high 577 yards defensively, and Brady Quinn passing for a season-low 148 yards.

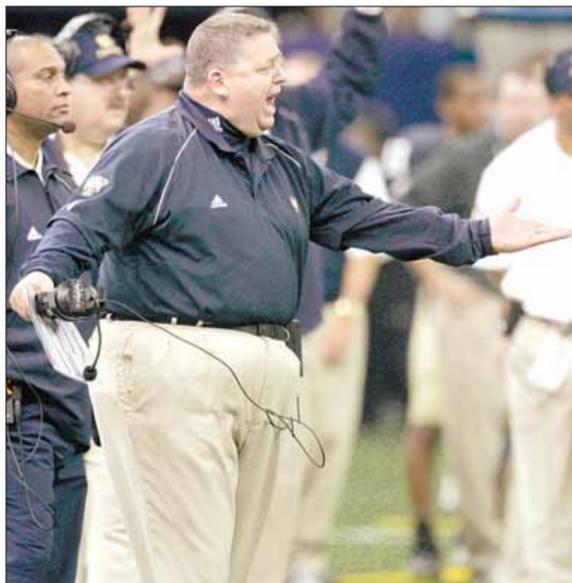
The loss followed a disappointing 44-24 loss to USC, giving Weis his first two-game losing streak.

This wasn't the ending Weis and the Irish had planned.

Notre Dame started the season with high hopes. Quinn, coming off a record-setting junior season, entered 2006 as the Heisman Trophy favorite, and the Irish opened the season ranked No. 2, their highest ranking in 13 years.

But they were quickly exposed with a 47-21 loss to Michigan in the third game of the season. The Irish were outscored 132-59 by top 10 opponents in three games this season and never held the lead in any of the games.

It's clear after big losses to Michigan, USC and LSU the Irish still have a lot of work to do.



Notre Dame football coach Charlie Weis reacts to a call during Wednesday's 41-14 loss to LSU in the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans.

"I think we came in the first year and made some good strides, but I don't think we took enough strides right here for me to be content," Weis said. "That means we need to take another couple of steps. Because if you want to play for it all, that's just not going to get it."

The first thing the Irish need is to improve defensively.

After giving up a school-record 397 yards a game last year, the

defense showed some improvement, surrendering 340 yards a game. But the Irish defense still hasn't played with the nasty attitude Weis promised when he arrived.

The Irish offense averaged 126 yards a game rushing, the lowest total in school history. Much of the blame goes to the offensive line, which never lived up to its promise.

The question now for the Irish:

How many seniors with another season of eligibility left will return?

The Irish will be a young team next season, with only eight of the 17 players who signed with Tyrone Willingham in 2004 still with the squad and only 13 players who will be juniors next year on the roster.

The promising news is Weis appears to be on the verge of signing his second straight highly touted recruiting class, which includes quarterback Jimmy Clausen, rated by many as the nation's best high school player.

Which leads to the question: Who will replace Quinn at quarterback? When asked about it this season, all Weis would say is, "It will be an interesting spring."

It will be an interesting fall as well as Weis tries to show that he can do more than make the Irish competitive.

For now, though, Weis is left lamenting a disappointing end to a disappointing season. The biggest disappointment was being unable to find a way to send this year's seniors out with a bowl victory.

"I don't feel bad for me. I don't even feel bad for the program," Weis said. "I feel bad for the guys walking out because those are the guys that are going to now walk out of here without ever having won a bowl game."

But he's also faced with another thought heading into the 2007 season.

"I'm going to have to do a better job," he said.

Quinn had moments, but he didn't play well in big games

By TOM COYNE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS

Quarterback Brady Quinn leaves Notre Dame with a long list of accomplishments.

He helped restore the Fighting Irish to respectability, leading the school to 19 wins the past two seasons. He ended the quarterback carousel that plagued the program since Jarious Jackson graduated in 1999. He also provided the Irish fans with some exhilarating come-from-behind wins.

However, Quinn leaves without the things he wanted most: a national championship, a bowl victory or a strong performance in a big game.

He came up short in his final chance, a 41-14 loss to LSU in the Sugar Bowl on Wednesday night.

He completed 15 of 35 passes for a season-low 148 yards, fewest yards since he passed for 140 yards against Michigan in the second game of the 2005 season.

The Irish trailed only 21-14 at halftime, but Quinn was just 4 of 10 passing in the second half.

Coach Charlie Weis said it wasn't all Quinn's fault, saying coaches called many three-step drops to keep LSU off balance.

"We ended up not having them thrown and caught," he said. "One



Notre Dame quarterback Brady Quinn throws a pass during the Fighting Irish's loss to LSU in the Sugar Bowl on Wednesday.

gets tipped, one arm gets pulled down, one we drop, one the ball bounced up. There was a combination of a bunch of those things."

Quinn's problems started on the first play of the game with an underthrow. But he also had problems overthrowing receivers and with receivers dropping balls.

It marked the third time this season Quinn failed against top 10 competition to complete more than 50 percent of his passes.

Quinn said the biggest problem was that the team couldn't convert on third downs.

"We just weren't productive," he said.

Quinn threw only seven interceptions all season, but three came against the Wolverines and two against the Tigers.

He nearly had another pass intercepted Wednesday, but that was overturned when it was reviewed by officials.

Nothing in a name for national championship game

By BEN WALKER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz.

The big matchup between Ohio State and Florida has almost everything that college football could want: No. 1 vs. No. 2, the Heisman Trophy winner, dazzling pageantry, neat traditions and a sparkling new stadium.

Only one thing is really missing. Namely, a catchy name.

"Bowl Championship Series national championship game; it's a little long," Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said diplomatically. "It'd be nice to have something that would brand it, something that resonates."

In other words, even Poinsettia

Bowl sounds better than the BCS national championship game. So do the Salad, Cigar and Astro-Bluebonnet bowls from long ago. Heck, even Division III has the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl.

But what?

"It should be something like 'Super Bowl,' but one level below because the NFL already took that. They stole it, I think. They don't have bowls in the NFL," Florida receiver Jemelle Cornelius said Thursday.

"I'm trying to think of a word that means the same thing, but not quite. It's not easy to come up with something," he said.

Bonanza Bowl? Blitz Bowl? "I don't like those at all," Cornelius said.

Those in charge are equally stumped. This is the first season a title bowl is being played, and the name game posed quite a challenge.

"The people in the BCS world, including commissioners, Fox television people and others, have talked at length about a moniker for the national championship game," BCS administrator Bill Hancock said. "Probably 300 or more ideas were suggested and considered."

"In the end, none of them felt appropriate; they seemed either contrived or hokey."

"So the group decided to wait and let it evolve," he said. "My feeling is that someday someone's daughter, or a journalist or a linebacker will come up with something perfect."

Don't laugh. That's how "Super Bowl" came about.

It was officially the AFL-NFL World Championship Game in the 1960s. Commissioner Pete Rozelle wanted "The Big One," and that got nixed. The late Lamar Hunt, one of the AFL founders, offered "Super Bowl" as a short-term solution.

He got the idea after watching his daughter bounce a SuperBall. Good thing he didn't notice her playing with a Slinky.

OK, back to college and Monday night's matchup.

"They should call it the 'Who's No. 1 Bowl' LSU linebacker Ali Highsmith said before the Tigers romped past Notre Dame 41-14 in the Sugar.

Next year, the BCS title game will

be played in New Orleans, part of a rotation that includes the sites of the Rose, Orange, Fiesta and Sugar bowls.

Ohio State punter A.J. Trapasso liked the idea of alternating names.

"They should vary it, depending on where it's played. I mean, I'd be fine if the national championship game was called the Peach Bowl, if that's where it was," he said. "Nothing against the Peach Bowl."

Florida played in the Peach — now renamed the Chick-fil-A Bowl — two seasons ago. The Gators are glad to be in this game, whatever it goes by.

"I mean, national championship says it all," offensive lineman Steve Rissler said. "But couldn't they come up with a better name?"

"Probably 300 or more ideas were suggested and considered. In the end, none of them felt appropriate; they seemed either contrived or hokey."

Bill Hancock
BCS administrator
on why the national
championship game
doesn't have a name

If a coach's lips are moving, chances are he's telling a lie

By STEVEN WINE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MIAMI

Nick Saban will be remembered in South Florida as a first-class fibber.

Saban misled his boss, players and fans, leaving the Miami Dolphins for Alabama when he said he wouldn't.



SABAN

In the wake of his departure, Saban was excoriated in newspaper columns and on talk shows as a loser and, almost as bad, a liar.

Dolphins wide receiver Wes Welker came to his former coach's defense.

"It's one of those deals where you maybe tell the girl that she looks good when she really doesn't," Welker said. "It was kind of the same situation, where it's OK to tell that lie in order to get the results that he needed."

Welker accepts the notion that deception is part of the game, especially when talking about job vacancies.

Coaches deny interest in switching teams, then become annoyed when their words are met with skepticism, as happened repeatedly during Alabama's courtship of Saban. Charlie Weis' credibility has been questioned as he pledges allegiance to Notre Dame amid rumors he'll jump to the NFL.

"Every coach," Weis said, "is perceived to be a liar. 'Well, Weis will say it, but we really shouldn't believe him because he's a liar.' I'm just using me as an example."

"Well, believe it or not, there are some people who aren't liars."

There are even some coaches who aren't liars. Former Dolphins coach Don Shula valued his integrity more than his NFL-record 347 victories, and he found Saban's disingenuous denials unseemly.

"He made it sound as if he wanted to be here, and he ended up in Alabama," said Shula, whose son Mike was fired by Alabama, creating the opening

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Saban filled. "You don't know what to believe."

In that regard, the new Crimson Tide coach is hardly alone. "Truthiness" was chosen word of the year in 2006, and that applied to football, too.

• Boston College coach Tom O'Brien said, "I'm not a candidate for any job." The next day, word leaked out he was bound for North Carolina State.

• Dennis Erickson, who has coached seven teams since 1982, signed a five-year contract with Idaho and said it would be his final stop. He lasted 10 months and one day before moving on to Arizona State in December.

If their lips are moving, they might be leaving. It's not a new trend.

• In 1999, Gary Barnett went to Colorado two days after sending an e-mail to his Northwestern players promising to lead them back to the Rose Bowl.

• In 1998, Mississippi coach Tommy Tuberville told an alumni group, "They'll have to carry me out of here in a pine box." He departed unaided a few days later for Auburn.

• Before the 1997 Super Bowl, Bill Parcells repeatedly denied he would leave the New England Patriots. Then he was gone, declining even to accompany the team back to Boston.

Saban preached loyalty and perseverance, then quit after going 15-17 in two seasons. To compound the crime, he told his players and owner Wayne Huizenga he was staying in Miami and said two weeks ago, "I'm not going to be the Alabama coach."

Do Dolphins players feel betrayed?

"Some things you've got to keep to yourself with those type of questions," cornerback Travis Daniels said. "At the end of the day, it's a business."

And that's the truth.

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Saban says his heart told him to take new job

By JOHN ZENOR
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TUSCALOOSA, Ala.

Nick Saban couldn't escape his college roots, so he quit trying.

Saban was introduced as Alabama's coach on Thursday, touting his championship aspirations and citing his love of college football as a reason for taking a pay cut to leave the Miami Dolphins.

In other words, he said the things Crimson Tide fans most wanted to hear.

"My heart's here. I love it here," he said. "I like to affect people, and that's why I'm here. This is obviously one of the best places in the country to have an opportunity to do that."

Taking over a program with a rich tradition led by the late coach Bear Bryant, who won five national titles, Saban refused to dwell in the past.

"It's what you do now," he said.

His résumé features the one thing Alabama fans hunger for most: a national title. His "championship credentials" — as athletic director Mal Moore put it — are why the Tide was willing to offer a reported eight-year deal worth an estimated \$32 million plus incentives, the richest in college football.

"I know there's tremendous expectations here," Saban said. "I can tell you that, however you feel about it, I have even higher expectations for what we want to accomplish. I want to win every game we play."

Saban led Alabama divisional rival LSU to a national title in 2003 and two SEC championships before heading to Miami.

Alabama hasn't won the league or even the Western Division since 1999 under Mike DuBose. The Tide's most recent national title — its sixth — came in 1992 under Gene Stallings.

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