

Irish have mystique like no one else

ND from page 12

The tradition, which has been present since the mid-'60s, takes place in the famed tunnel on the north side of the stadium and is viewed behind a gate by hundreds of spectators.

Friday night's activities are just the beginning of game day.

From sunrise on, ND's campus is littered with people looking to take in as much as they can before kickoff. A few of Notre Dame's famous sites include the Grotto, the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, the Golden Dome, Hesburgh Library (Touchdown Jesus) and the College Football Hall of Fame located in downtown South Bend.

Architecture Hall is the gathering point for the band, which wakes students up early in the morning by marching around campus.

The band gathers on the steps of the building and plays a short concert before marching toward the stadium.

"The path is probably 3/4 of a mile and it is lined with four or five people deep," said Gurgol, who plays clarinet. "Most of them are tearing up, and some of them call people back home on their cell phone so they can hear us play."

"That is kind of neat because we know that we are playing not only for the people there, but for others around the country."

The Band of the Fighting Irish, created in 1845, is the oldest university band in existence and has played at every home game since 1887.

Once the band arrives at the stadium, the pageantry of the game begins.

Notre Dame Stadium, built in 1930 and renovated in 1997, now holds 80,232 spectators.

Current South Bend Tribune sports Editor Bill Bilinski said the expansion from 59,000 to the current 80,000-plus was a necessity.

"People used to talk about how difficult a stadium it was (for opposing teams) to come into, and that had been somewhat lost," he said.

"If you go to Tennessee and have 100,000 people around you, you can feel it. The extra seats have increased the noise level a bit," he said.

And what a sight it is, Gurgol said.

"We run out of the tunnel, and the roar of the crowd is like no sound I have ever heard," she said. "I probably stopped the first time I did it because the fans are screaming so loud."

Coming out of the tunnel is also special to players, who hit a sign that reads "Play Like a Champion Today" before they run onto the field.

"It's the biggest adrenaline rush a person can have," defensive lineman Grant Irons said.

"When you walk out of that tunnel and look into the stands with the 80,000 screaming fans, you say to yourself, 'this is what college football is all about.'"

Mike Brown, who has been the school mascot - the leprechaun - for two years now, said it is exciting to be a part of something so big.

"The band comes out, and the team comes out, and it is incredible," said Brown, who is a senior at ND. "Just being a part of what I have watched before and now, being on the field and one of the main people is awesome."

Doyle said that while some Irish fans can be wild, they are pretty tame compared with other stadiums.

"From observing it from here and going to other places, I don't think the fan interest and enthusiasm in the stands is as high as Alabama or Louisiana State," he said. "Fans in places like Oklahoma get real rabid, and Notre Dame fans are pretty quiet in comparison."

While they may be quiet, hospitality is one thing Irish fans pride themselves on.

Every usher greets you like your next door neighbor. The guy next to you wearing the Ron

Powlus jersey makes good conversation.

And, often, an Irish win completes the magic of the week.

The sights and sounds of a Notre Dame football Saturday are abandoned, replaced by the same mess of empty cups and hot dog wrappers found in every other college football stadium in the country.

Something you can't quite grasp, that something that sets the Fighting Irish apart, lies dormant amidst the mess, awaiting another Notre Dame football weekend.

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Beasley uneasy starter

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1/2 quarters. "They have heard so much," Snyder said. "They saw the spring game, they anticipate seeing him on the field. I don't see it as our fans picking a side."

For his part, Beasley said expectations for Roberson, who has thrown one pass and rushed once, are simply too high.

"It's a matter where no matter what the expectations are, you can only go out there and play the best you can," he said.

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