

After the worst football season in their history two years ago, the Fighting Irish hit the

# NOTRE DAME — 1958 CHAMPS?

**T**HIS COULD BE the season in which Notre Dame finds the right fork in the road on its long journey back to national football laurels.

The South Bend, Ind., school, one of the pioneers of big-time college football, isn't doing too much talking about this—at least not for publication.

It's been 10 years since the Irish have won the national title. And though some observers close to the Notre Dame scene say that 1958 still will be part of the rebuilding program, there are solid reasons why the Irish might wind up on top of the heap. In any case, they should be very strong contenders.

Though he's starting his fifth season at what is generally regarded as the toughest job in college football, Notre Dame's coach Terry Brennan, at 30, is the youngest of the game's major skippers.

Yet Terry already has carried as heavy a load of problems, pressures, and headaches as many of the old salts of the college coaching fraternity.

After winning 17 of its 20 games in the first two seasons under Brennan, Notre Dame blew a big gasket in the 1956 season, losing eight of 10 games in its worst season in history.

Buzzards could be seen circling over Terry's head. There were cries of "Fire the coach" from many corners; charges that Notre Dame was de-emphasizing the sport she had made famous; that Brennan had been a good coach while he was using the material of his predecessor pilot, Frank Leahy; that Brennan was a baby trying to do a man's work.

The ignoble '56 season hit its dramatic peak on the eve of the final game when Leahy stepped into the picture with a public statement that the legendary "Fighting Irish" lacked fight. Brennan was deeply hurt by the remark of his former coach, and there has been a reported coolness between the two ever since.

Brennan had been a bread-and-butter halfback under Leahy, whose explicit instructions to the Notre Dame quarterback were: "Remember, when it's fourth down within striking distance of the goal and you only need a few yards, give the ball to Terry." Brennan, who never lacked fight, almost always delivered.

**L**OSING FOOTBALL seasons at Notre Dame are about as rare as Democrats in Vermont. There was the 0-1 record in 1887, the 1-2 season in 1888, the 3-5-1 one in 1933, and the worst of them all, the 2-8 misery in '56.

So it figured that this school, founded by the French, made famous by a Norwegian immigrant coach, Knute Rockne, and identified as "Irish," would be a target for questions before last season.

Father Hesburgh, the school's president, fenced beautifully with the big question of de-emphasis. He said simply: "You can only de-emphasize that which you have emphasized, and we have never emphasized football here at Notre Dame. We like having good football teams but will not lower our scholastic standards to have them. The passing grade at Notre Dame is 70, but our athletes must average

77 to be eligible for competition with the varsity."

But for the hardened sports buff, who counts success in wins and losses, Brennan and his Notre Dame players answered the question with action in '57, posting an amazing 7-3 record against a murderous schedule.

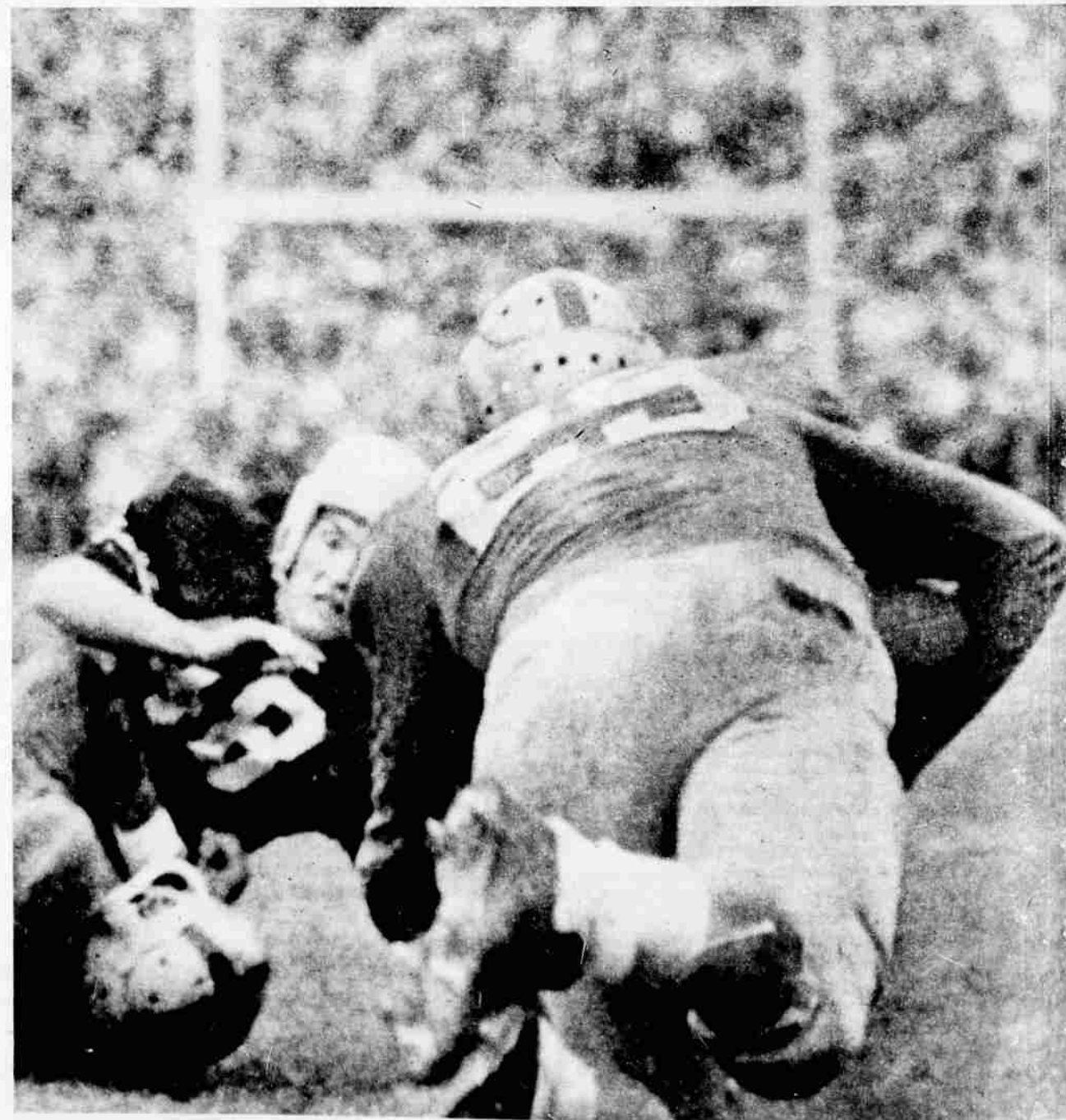
In many ways, Notre Dame, long accustomed to taking the bows, regarded this as its greatest season of glory—even better than a national title.

She had gone into last season in a rare role, a

distinct underdog. Even her die-hard, loyal "sub-way alumni" didn't see any hope of better than an even split in 10 games. But what she accomplished became the comeback story of the sports year.

"Sleepy" Jim Crowley of Four Horsemen fame, who knew many hours of Notre Dame grid glory, called it "my favorite Notre Dame team of all."

Among the wins were dramatic performances over Army and the big blast which stopped Oklahoma's winning streak. Those two games would



The Fighting Irish, with their all-out brand of football, may have the horses to drive to the 1958 title.

comeback trail in '57; here's why they may win the national title this season.

by Dave Warner

have been worthy of successful-season consideration in themselves.

The week after beating Oklahoma, the Irish took on a powerful Iowa team and almost worked the miracle of toppling two giants in a row. Notre Dame had a chance of beating the Hawkeyes going into the fourth quarter, but finally succumbed, 21-13. A key play in the hard-fought game was a touchdown pass that was touched by five players, two of them Notre Dame's, before it wound up in the hands of an Iowa player in the end zone.

"Brennan gets my vote as Coach of the Year," Forrest Evashevski, the Iowa coach, commented.

Ed (Moose) Krause, Notre Dame's mammoth-sized director of athletics, who played and assisted in coaching football at Notre Dame, summed up the comeback: "We, of course, hoped for improvement over that dismal '56 record. But what a job Terry did! It was astounding. He's going into the '58 season with a raise in salary, and nobody deserved it more."

In appraising prospects for this season, Brennan, acting in the manner of a smooth politician, says, "I think we have a good start on the way back to bid for national honors. We're on the way back, but it will take another year or so before we are in a position to be fighting for the national championship. Our main problem now is finding depth for a truly dependable second unit—one that we can send in without worry anytime during a game."

**T**HERE ARE MANY REASONS why this 70th Notre Dame football team may be a memorable one:

1. Brennan's experience begins to pay off more each season. A coach has to stay super-alert when he plays Notre Dame's schedule.

2. Brennan's coaching staff is getting stronger

each year. Latest addition is Hugh Devore, who was brought in to coach the freshmen. Devore has 20 years of college and professional coaching experience. Last year Bernie Crimmins was rehired as a Notre Dame assistant after holding down a head coaching job. With such men as these on the staff, it wouldn't appear that Notre Dame is de-emphasizing.

3. Those sophomores who got pushed around in the '56 season are all seniors now, the nucleus of the '58 squad, and ready to finish their college playing careers in style.

4. Easier schedule. This calls for quick explanation. No Notre Dame schedule is ever easy, for there's a long line of schools which consider their season a success if they can beat Notre Dame. Two toughies—Oklahoma and Michigan State—are not on the ND schedule this year. The slate of Indiana, Southern Methodist, Army, Duke, Purdue, Navy, Pitt, North Carolina, Iowa, and Southern California, while rugged, doesn't measure up to 1957.

5. The possibility of strong All-American candidates at five positions: co-Capt. Al Ecuier of New Orleans at guard; Bronko Nagurski, International Falls, Minn., at tackle; Monty Stickles, Poughkeepsie, N. Y., at end; Bob Williams, Wilkes-Barre, Pa., at quarterback; and Nick Pietrosante, Ansonia, Conn., at fullback.

6. Dependable quarterbacking. Any Notre Dame team which has made its mark always has had strong quarterbacking. This year the Irish have Williams, a senior, backed up by a fine junior, George Izo of Barberton, Ohio. Maybe neither is a Johnny Lujack or Paul Hornung, but both can do a great job.

7. Restored confidence with that 7-3 record after the 2-8 season. Brennan says the win over Army when the game seemed

hopelessly lost lifted the squad a long way last season. Confidence is half the battle.

8. Good squad balance. There are 25 returning lettermen, with monogram winners at all positions. Eight of the Irish's 10 top ground-gainers last season are back this year.

Enthusiasm is definitely on the upswing at Notre Dame, not that it ever really died. When Brennan called for Spring football candidates, 104 of them, largest in five years, turned out.

In Jim Colisimo, Eveleth, Minn.; Stickles, hero of the Army game last year; Gary Meyers, Spokane; Dick Royer, Cincinnati; and Bob Wetoska, Minneapolis, Notre Dame may have five of the best ends in the country.

And in breakaway runners Patrick Doyle of Sioux City, Iowa, and Jim Crotty of Seattle, the Irish may have two of the fleetest since Bob Livingstone, Creighton Miller, and Coy McGee were blazing the gridiron 10 to 15 years ago.

The winning tradition has a strong flavor at Notre Dame, whose record of 185 wins, 49 losses, and 14 ties is the best of all major college football teams over the last 26 years.

When Rockne was coaching Notre Dame teams, the wins very often used to come as a result of deft psychological pitchforking. "Rock" had the knack of getting his players fighting mad with such needles as "Okay, girls, let's go." Or by opening the door of the Notre Dame dressing room after a poor first half and saying, "Sorry, I thought this was the Notre Dame dressing room," then closing the door on his stunned squad.

Leahy got great results with a combination of perfecting his squad to the last detail while weeping to the press about a lack of material. He was a master at crooning the blues even while Notre Dame was racking up a record of 39 consecutive victories over a period of four years.

Brennan, whose record is 26 wins, 14 defeats, plays it with a more matter-of-fact approach, neither trying to kid himself, his players, or the press. He gets better results playing it straight.

"Psychology in the dressing room is all right sometimes," he says, "but the game has changed so much that all you've got time for is to prepare your team for each game as best you can, then make the necessary changes at half-time. Besides, I can see where a lot of that psychology could backfire."

His players have great respect for Terry. One of them recently summed it up this way: "If he asked me to run through a brick wall, I'd do it, because I'd figure he had a good reason."

As for the football coach's time-honored crying towel, Brennan, who has a law degree, doesn't permit himself the luxury of tears, instead rests his case on: "Excessive moaning never gained a yard on a football field yet."

So this may be the year for the Fighting Irish to regain the national crown they abdicated 10 years ago. At any rate, they'll be the team to watch. They always have been.

**Dave Warner** received his journalism training at Notre Dame in the post-war era when the Fighting Irish were in the habit of winning national titles. Warner is now a sports writer for the Rochester (N. Y.) Democrat and Chronicle. He has written magazine articles on numerous sports subjects and is also the author of a book on Notre Dame coach Terry Brennan.



Athletic Director Ed Krause gives coach credit for team's comeback.



A goat in 1956, Terry Brennan is riding high after great 1957 season.

