

Ty's time

Willingham era gets started at Notre Dame on Saturday

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (AP) — Tyrone Willingham smiled slyly when asked why he took the Notre Dame coaching job knowing he would be living in a fish bowl.

"Because I get to swim with the fishes," he said.

It's been choppy so far, though, taking over a program that is as far from its glory days as it has ever been.

He was hired amid turmoil following the embarrassing resignation of George O'Leary

after just five days on the job and has seen the team lose six players during the off season, including three who were



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expelled from school after a woman said she was raped.

It's been as tumultuous an off-season as Notre Dame has ever seen, and the school has had hard times recently. Notre Dame came off probation last year after the NCAA found that Kimberly Dunbar, who embezzled more than \$1.2 million from a company she worked for, spent some of the money to buy Irish players diamond pendants and trips to Las Vegas.

It's been tough on the field as well. Notre Dame has not seriously challenged for a national championship in nine years, when it finished the season ranked No. 2 behind Florida State. Since then, the Irish have a 58-36-1 record, averaging 4.5 losses a season.

The Irish haven't won a national championship since 1988, the second longest stretch without a title in school history. That's three years shy of the 17-year gap between the 1949 and 1966 championship teams.

Notre Dame hasn't finished the season ranked in the top 10 since 1993 — the longest such drought in school history.

The Irish haven't had a first-team All-America since 1993 and haven't had a Heisman winner since Tim Brown in 1987. They haven't had anyone finish in the top 10 in balloting since Reggie Brooks finished fifth when Miami's Gino Torretta won in 1992.

Despite all those problems, Willingham said the Irish will win championships again.

"Why not?" he said when asked by a reporter about it.

Some have said Notre Dame's tough academic standards, difficult schedule and lack of a conference tie combine to make it increasingly harder to compete against schools that can take in virtually anybody, play weak non-conference schedules and have conference affiliations.

But many others, including former Irish coaches Lou Holtz and Ara

Parseghian, say there is no reason Notre Dame can't be a power again and recruit the nation's top players.

"I know when I was recruiting there were certain kids out there who were just waiting for Notre Dame to call," former Nebraska coach Tom Osborne said. "They have a national fan base and a national television contract. There's no reason Notre Dame can't win, and I think they will win under Tyrone Willingham."

Willingham thinks so too, although he won't make any predictions about when.

"If you are asking for a timetable, I'm not that brilliant. I wish I could give you one," he said. "But our goal is to win and I've clearly stated that."

Willingham, who runs from place to place on the practice field and commands attention with his soft voice, comes off at first impression as a non-nonsense coach, but he has revealed a dry sense of humor.

"Is that company issued?" he said with a smile when a reporter's tape recorder fell from a speaker and crashed to the floor.

Asked about the difference of coaching at Stanford and Notre Dame, he replied: "The weather's been a little cooler. The address to my home has changed, too."

When a reporter told Willingham at media day that he heard he ran grueling preseason practices, Willingham looked at the players on the other side of the arena and whispered: "Don't say that too loud."

But Willingham is guarded in his answers, revealing as little as possible. Some questions he simply won't answer, such as the goals he's set for this season. He said that's between him and the team.

Willingham is aware of the scrutiny that coaching the Irish will bring, although those who have held the job previously say it is impossible to realize the immense pressures that come with the position until being faced with them.

The pressure caused health problems for Knute Rockne, and Frank Leahy and Parseghian each retired after 11 seasons because of the pressures. Leahy retired following the 1953 season after collapsing during a game and being given the Last Rites in the locker room.

If he wants to see how eager the school is to win, Willingham need not look back any further than last year. After Bob Davie led Notre Dame to a 9-3 record and a Fiesta Bowl appearance in 2000, the school rewarded him with a new five-year contract. After opening the season 0-3 last year, White called Davie into his office and told him he was thinking of firing him before the season was over.

Davie went from having a long-term contract to a coach who might not finish the season in three



The Associated Press
Notre Dame coach Tyrone Willingham shouts out instructions at the beginning of practice in South Bend, Ind. The former Stanford coach begins his career at Notre Dame Saturday against Maryland in the Kickoff Classic at the Meadowlands.

games. He was fired a day after the Irish finished 5-6.

Willingham said he's always handled pressure well because his expectations have always been higher than those around him. He may find it hard to have higher goals than the Notre Dame faithful, though.

Asked how he will deal with those pressures, Willingham said he wouldn't pretend to be unaffected.

"But I believe that hopefully there is a system within me, a system I created, that will allow me to focus and do the things I need to do," he said. "But you can't judge any of that until you've been through it."

Among other Division I-A independent schools, Navy also has a new coach. Paul Johnson, offensive coordinator at Navy from 1995-96, takes over a team that went 0-10 last year — the worst season in 121 years of playing football at Annapolis. Johnson, who helped guide Navy to a win in the Aloha Bowl in 1996, was 62-10 in five seasons at Georgia Southern, leading the Eagles to two straight NCAA Division I-AA titles. The Midshipmen will switch to a triple-option offense.

Connecticut is preparing for its first season with all I-A opponents in its third year at this level. Coach Randy Edsall is hoping the Huskies, who return 10 starters on defense and eight on offense, are bigger, faster and healthier than last sea-

2002 NOTRE DAME SCHEDULE

Day	Date	Opponent	Time
Sat	Aug. 31	vs. Maryland	8 p.m.
Sat	Sept. 7	Purdue	1 p.m.
Sat	Sept. 14	Michigan	2:30 p.m.
Sat	Sept. 21	at Michigan State	12:10 p.m.
Sat	Oct. 5	Stanford	2:30 p.m.
Sat	Oct. 12	Pittsburgh	2:30 p.m.
Sat	Oct. 19	at Air Force	Noon
Sat	Oct. 26	at Florida State	Noon
Sat	Nov. 2	Boston College	2:30 p.m.
Sat	Nov. 23	Rutgers	1 p.m.
Sat	Nov. 30	at USC	8 p.m.

son, when they were plagued by key injuries in going 2-9.

South Florida, which moved into Division I-A last season and went 8-3, including surprising Pittsburgh, is led by quarterback Marquel Blackwell, who completed 258 of 456 passes last season for 2,882 yards with 20 touchdowns and 11 interceptions.

Troy State, which beat Mississippi State 21-9 last season en route to a 7-4 record, officially became a Division I-A school last month and celebrates by playing a difficult schedule that includes Nebraska, Iowa State, Missouri, Mississippi State, Marshall, and Arkansas. The Trojans need to find replacements for quarterback Brock Nutter, a four-year starter, and running back Demontray Carter, the leading rusher the past two seasons.

Utah State, 4-7 last year, is look-

2001 RESULTS

Nebraska 27, Notre Dame 10
Michigan St. 17, Notre Dame 10
Texas A&M 24, Notre Dame 3
Notre Dame 24, Pittsburgh 7
Notre Dame 34, W. Virginia 24
Notre Dame 27, USC 17
Boston Coll. 21, Notre Dame 17
Tennessee 28, Notre Dame 18
Notre Dame 34, Navy 16
Stanford 17, Notre Dame 13
Notre Dame 24, Purdue 18

ing for a replacement for running back Emmett White, who had 2,014 all-purpose yards last season. Coach Mick Dennehy hopes a veteran line will help whoever wins the job. The Aggies, who play Iowa and Nebraska this season, are seeking their first winning season since 1996.