

# Fork in the road for Irish coach

*Notre Dame 5-7 in second season under Willingham*

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (AP) — Will Tyrone Willingham be the next Ara Parseghian or the next Bob Davie?

That's what the Notre Dame faithful is wondering as Willingham enters his third season as coach of perhaps the most high-profile college football program in America.

In his first season, Willingham reminded many of Parseghian, taking over a losing squad and turning things around immediately. The Irish won eight straight to start the season before finishing 10-3, leading some to believe they were ready to return to the top of the sport.

But in year two, the Irish fell back to the ways of Davie, following a good season with a bad one for a seventh straight year. Not only did the Irish go 5-7, four of their losses were by 26 points or more.

It's bad enough to lose seven games at Notre Dame — posting the third losing record in five seasons for the first time in 115 years of Irish football. But the loss to Michigan was the eighth-most lopsided loss in school history, while the loss to Florida State ranks ninth.

To be beaten so thoroughly angered alumni and fans.

The Irish players understand the frustration.

"That's not our character. We don't play ball like that," linebacker Mike Goolsby said. "The way we played my junior year is the way the game is supposed to be played at Notre Dame."

Willingham hopes that's true. Because if history is any indication, this year could be pivotal.

The third year has historically been a barometer of success for Notre Dame coaches. Parseghian, Frank Leahy, Dan Devine and Lou Holtz all won national championships in their third seasons. Knute Rockne had his second

straight undefeated season.

Terry Brennan was 2-8 in his third season at Notre Dame. Joe Kuharich was 5-5. Gerry Faust was 7-5. Davie was 5-7. All four lasted just five years as Notre Dame.

Willingham is aware of the trend but doesn't give it any significance. He doesn't see this year as being any more crucial.

"Ever year at Notre Dame is important," he said.

He's not counting on Notre Dame mystique to turn things around.

"You have to work to make those kinds of things happen. It's not some dust that will all of a sudden drift from the dome over to our practice field and make us a great football team," Willingham said. "Our guys have to work for that to happen."

Willingham believes his players have done that, saying last season's losses have motivated the Irish. He also believes experience at key positions will help.

Last season the Irish returned one starting offensive lineman. This year the line returns four starters. The Irish also have their quarterback of the future for the fourth time in five years. Two of the previous starters switched positions (Arnaz Battle and Carlyle Holiday became receivers) and another, Matt LoVecchio, switched schools, transferring to Indiana.

The future is now in the hands of sophomore Brady Quinn. He showed promise last season in starting nine games. He set school freshmen records for completions and yards, going 157-for-332 for 1,831 yards.

Despite those numbers, the Irish offense struggled for a third straight season. Willingham concedes his team has taken longer than expected to master the West Coast offense.

"I wanted to have great success and have everything in place on Day 1," he said. "But obviously that wasn't the case," he said.

The defense, which led



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The honeymoon is over for Notre Dame coach Tyrone Willingham.

Notre Dame's surprising turnaround two seasons ago, returns some key players. Goolsby, who sat out last season with a broken collarbone after finishing third in tackles in 2002, is back.

Linebacker Brandon Hoyte, second in tackles last season, and defensive end Justin Tuck, who was third, also return.

The Irish need to regain the poise they played with in 2002. While that squad never got rattled when things were going poorly, last year's team seemed to easily lose confidence. When things started going badly, the Irish played

worse.

To do that, a strong start is needed, Willingham said.

That won't be easy. Notre Dame's always challenging schedule starts with a game at BYU and a home game

against Michigan.

"To really give it credence, to make it concrete, you've got to win. That's what we have to do," he said. "Winning is what it is all about."

Especially at Notre Dame.

## 2004 Notre Dame schedule

Day	Date	Opponent	Time
Sat.	Sept. 4	at Brigham Young	9:15 p.m.
Sat.	Sept. 11	vs. Michigan	2:30 p.m.
Sat.	Sept. 18	at Michigan State	7 p.m.
Sat.	Sept. 25	vs. Washington	2:30 p.m.
Sat.	Oct. 2	vs. Purdue	1:30 p.m.
Sat.	Oct. 9	vs. Stanford	1:30 p.m.
Sat.	Oct. 16	at Navy	Noon
Sat.	Oct. 30	vs. Boston College	1:30 p.m.
Sat.	Nov. 6	at Tennessee	TBA
Sat.	Nov. 13	vs. Pittsburgh	2:30 p.m.
Sat.	Nov. 27	at USC	8 p.m.