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Zimmerman's leadership greatly valued at Notre Dame

By Marty Budner

ECCENTRIC STAFF WRITER

Birmingham Brother Rice graduate Ross Zimmerman estimated he's played lacrosse at Maple Field "about 100" times.

On Friday, in his first college game on that familiar turf, Zimmerman helped lead Notre Dame to a 10-6 victory over Quinnipiac University in the first of two Great Western Lacrosse League semifinal games. The win vaulted Zimmerman and the Irish into the GWLL championship game slated for noon today against Ohio State.

A senior defender for Notre Dame, Zimmerman was thrilled to return to the venue where he honed his skills as a youngster.

"It was nice to be back," said Zimmerman. "I've been playing on this field since I was in middle school.

"This was an exciting experience," he said. "The weather wasn't great (it rained throughout most of the first half), but it was a good home crowd. It's nice having a home tournament in the Midwest where we can play for a championship."

Zimmerman has enjoyed an outstanding career at Notre Dame, highlighted by his recent selection to the GWLL's first-team defense. He also was a pre-season All-American selection by Inside Lacrosse magazine.

The awards are well deserved as Zimmerman and his fellow defenders helped Notre Dame pace the GWLL in goals-against average (7.23 per game). Irish goalie Joey Kemp also led the league in save percentage (.603) thanks to his talented corps of defenders.

Notre Dame head coach Kevin Corrigan said Zimmerman, a three-year varsity starter who also played in every game as a freshman, has been a valuable team leader.

"Ross is probably as fundamentally sound as anybody we have, and for the way we play, that's really important," said Corrigan. "It makes him a tremendous leader just by example. He's also a great kid and a great natural leader on his own. So, both on and off the field, I think he's a player that everyone on the team respects and really sets the tone for us.

"He came into our program knowing how to play off the ball very effectively. He really has added something to his game every year he's played for us. I don't know if we have a more well-rounded defenseman on the ball, off the ball, in the crease, outside, up top. I mean there's nowhere he can't play right now.

"For a guy that gives you that kind of versatility, it helps your whole defense be better," Corrigan said. "There's no question he's been an impact player for us."

Zimmerman said his high school career prepared him tremendously for the collegiate level. He added Brother Rice head coach Rob Ambrose was instrumental in teaching him the fundamentals of playing strong defense.

"We always tried to play the best talent when I was at Brother Rice," said Zimmerman. "We traveled outside the state where we played a lot of good teams. There's nothing that can prepare you for the speed of the college game, but we did play with the same amount of intensity in high school. The game's the same at the college level, but it's just faster."

While at Brother Rice, Zimmerman was a member of four state championship teams. His dream ending at Notre Dame would be to march off with the national championship trophy.

The Irish have qualified for the NCAA Division 1 tournament the past two seasons, losing in the first round both times to eventual national champions Johns Hopkins and Virginia, respectively.

"The program has really picked up since I got here, since my freshman year when we didn't make the tournament to the last two years when we did," Zimmerman said. "It's getting there, and hopefully it can end with a championship this year."

The winner of today's Notre Dame/Ohio State GWLL championship game earns an automatic berth to the NCAA Division 1 tournament. Zimmerman hopes to lead the Irish to the national finals for a third straight season.
