Hoping to set the tone for a day of Irish sports, the Notre Dame men's basketball team defeated St. Francis 69-52 on Saturday.

Cameron Biedscheid, Eric Atkins, and Jack Cooley shared scoring honors for Notre Dame with 13 apiece as the Irish made 49% of their shots while holding SFU to 39%. Jerian Grant and Garrick Sherman, who started for ailing Scott Martin, added 11 points each to put five Irish players into double figures. Cooley's 13 rebounds led the Irish to a 42-25 advantage on the boards.

"It was methodical," Head Coach Mike Brey said after the game. "That's how we play. We are who we are."

“We knew what to expect coming in here with a Notre Dame team that’s the most physical and has the most size of any team we’ve seen to date,” said St. Francis Head Coach Rob Krimmel. “The certainly wield their style.”

The Irish opened the game with three well-executed offensive possessions in halfcourt offense. First, Eric Atkins drove the baseline and got a floater to drop. Grant followed with a drive into the lane and a short jumper, and Pat Connaughton fed Atkins for an open three to give the Irish a quick 7-2 lead.

ND’s scoring streak was stopped when Sherman lost the ball in the post after being poked in the eye, but Biedscheid, who replaced Sherman, promptly hit a pair of three point baskets to continue the early Irish assault. They led 13-4 barely five minutes into the game.

There were no lingering effects to the eye after the game. “I was stunned when it happened, but I can see pretty clear now,” Sherman said.

Notre Dame shot well during the first 10 minutes of the half, making 7 of 11 shots from the field. Normally a high field goal percentage means Jack Cooley is getting scoring opportunities, but he took (and missed) just one shot at that point. Instead the Irish were getting open jump shots and making them. Atkins was 3-3, and Biedscheid was 3-4 from three point range.

Then the Irish began to use their size advantage. Sherman scored twice from the post, and Cooley added a layup to give the Irish a 13 point lead with 6:30 left in the half. “I loved that our perimeter continually fed the post tonight,” said Brey.

St. Francis answered, sandwiching jumpers by Stephon Mosely and Umar Shannon around a pair of missed free throws by Zach Auguste to cut the lead to nine points. Then Sherman split a pair of free throws, and SFU’s Ronnie Drinnon put an offensive rebound into the basket to cut the lead to 29-21 with 2:39 left in the half.

Cooley broke the mini-run with an offensive rebound basket, but Shannon answered with a nice drive and a floater over Cooley to keep the lead at eight points. Grant answered with an off

balance jumper with five seconds left. Then Atkins stole the inbounds pass and converted a layup as the horn sounded to extend the Irish lead to 12 points, 35-23.

Atkins last second basket gave him a team leading 11 points to go with three assists and no turnovers. Beidscheid added 9 points, and Cooley led the Irish with 7 rebounds. Shannon led SFU with 7 points.

The Irish held a 19-11 halftime rebounding advantage while shooting 54% (14-26) from the field and 44% (4-9) from three point range. “What we really tried to do the last couple of days was work offensively and be better screeners,” said Brey. “I thought there had been slippage, so we concentrated on that. I don’t want to lose our defensive identity, but I felt we had to make it an offensive day the last two days in practice.”

The Flash made only 38% of its shots against the Irish man-to-man defense.

St. Francis started the second half determined to make a game of it. Ollie Jackson hit a three on the first possession, but Cooley answered from the post. Mosely scored on a nice drive, and again Cooley answered, this time following a Grant missed jumper. Shannon hit a pair of jumpers, but Sherman answered with a pair of layups, the latter a nice catch-and-shoot on a fast break feed from Grant. When Biedscheid made a three point shot with 13:18 left to play, the Irish had a 51-35 lead, and the gritty Red Flash had no more haymakers to throw.

ND scored the next 11 points to extend the run to 14. With the outcome secure, only final stats and the amount of playing time for the bench players remained to be determined.

Irish Notes

Jerian Grant attempted only three shots from beyond the arc on Saturday. “I made more of an effort to get into the lane but not all the way to the basket,” said Grant. “It’s something I should use a lot more, and it’s something I’ve been working on.”

Cameron Biedscheid made 4 of 6 three point attempts. He has been working on being more assertive on offense. “If I have the open three, don’t make it hard on myself,” he said. “Just shoot it.”

The Irish struggled at the free throw line again making just 5-13. "We gotta be better from the foul line," said Brey. "We hope the law of averages can kick in a bit. I don't want guys thinking too much about it, but we have to be better."

Scott Martin missed the game with tendinitis in his knee. "Hopefully he'll be ready for Monday," Brey said. "We just wanted to rest it. It was starting to bother him in New York, and he gutted out the GW game. He wanted to play, but his leg was really bothering him."

The starting guards, Atkins and Grant, combined for 15 assists and only 2 turnovers. Bray sang Atkins’ praises after the game. “I can’t say enough about him. I just ignore him and watch the other four guys.”