



NOTRE DAME, Ind. – What a difference an opponent makes. After looking at times like they were sleepwalking against unranked tomato cans like Chicago State and George Washington, Notre Dame turned things up in front of a sellout crowd on Thursday night to defeat defending national champion and No. 8 ranked Kentucky 64-50.

“What a fun night,” Irish head coach Mike Brey exclaimed after the game. “That was a great night. Our fans were awesome. The energy in the building was great and I’m really proud of our group. We really prepared like an experienced team the last two days. I thought we played like an experienced group (and) defended excellently for 40 minutes.”

The Irish held Kentucky well below its nearly 56% field goal percentage. The Wildcats (4-2) shot just 40% (19-of-47). They actually shot better in the second half after connected on just 9-of-27 (37%) in the game’s first 20 minutes.

Kentucky’s 50 points were the fewest allowed by an Irish team against a top-50 opponent since a 52-47 win over No. 5 Maryland in 1984. It also marked the fewest points scored by a Kentucky team since head coach John Calipari took over the program three-plus seasons ago.

“We weren’t looking for each other,” Calipari say of his team’s offensive woes. “Whoever had it was trying to score and you can’t really play that way. Hopefully we will watch some tape and figure stuff out. The good news is that we play in 36 hours, so we can’t sulk over this one,

because we have a game to play back to back.”

Brey said during the week that he was expecting a similar atmosphere to the one he and his team saw last January when they knocked-off an unbeaten and No. 1 ranked Syracuse team and that is exactly what he got. The Purcell Pavilion at the Joyce Center’s crowd was simply electric from start to finish in Notre Dame’s first signature win of the 2012-2013 season.

“Our crowd was definitely our sixth man tonight,” Brey praised of the 9,149 strong that packed into the home arena. “That building was electric. Having our football guys there was awesome, but it was a tough atmosphere (for Kentucky) to play in. When our atmosphere is like that I don’t care if you’re young or old it’s probably gonna be tough to win in there.”

A large contingent of Irish football players, including captains Manti Te’o, Zack Martin, Tyler Eifert, and “Super fan” Kapron Lewis-Moore, sat at the front of the Notre Dame student section near Kentucky’s bench. The captains were recognized at halftime and Te’o, who earlier in the day received the ARA Sportsmanship Award, was recognized for that as well during a timeout. He arrived at the game during the second media timeout with 10:52 to play in the first half.

Dialing-up From Deep

Notre Dame entered the game shooting just 37% (49-of-132) from three-point range for the season, but they were locked-in from long range in the win. The Fighting Irish were 8-of-15 against the Wildcats Thursday night for a net-ripping 53%.

“It was definitely big,” Jerian Grant, who was 3-for-4 from distance, said of ND’s three-point ability. “Once we started knocking down threes it was easier to get into the lane and dish-off to Jack (Cooley) or me or Eric (Atkins) – if we miss a shot because a guy’s coming over to block it’s easier for Jack to get rebounds.”

Scott Martin was 2-for-2 from behind the arc. He connected on his 100th career trey with 15:14 remaining to make the Irish lead 45-31.

Kentucky started 1-for-9 from long distance, but got back in the game when Julius Mays, a Marion, Ind. native hit three consecutive threes in a three-minute stretch to pull the Wildcats within 13 points at the 6:28 mark. The first of his treys ended a 10-0 Irish run with 9:37 to play after ND had taken a 20-point lead.

The Wildcats finished 4-for-14 (28%) on their three-pointers.

Double Cool

Cooley collected his sixth double-double of the season when he grabbed with 10th rebound and followed it with a layup with 1:55 remaining. Kentucky had cut the Irish lead to 10 points prior to Cooley's basket, which ended a five-minute stretch without a field goal.

He finished the game with 13 points and 11 rebounds, but the bulk of those totals, eight points and seven boards, came in the first half.

"I think the overall intensity of the overall game really got ratcheted-up," Cooley said afterward of the difference between the first and second halves. "I think coach Cal lit a fire under them at halftime and told them not to let us score in the paint anymore. I think they started being a little bit more physical in there."

Brey commented during the week that he knew his team would have a tough time scoring points inside the lane due to Kentucky's big front line, which included a pair of 6'10 players and 7-foot forward Willie Cauley-Stein. The Irish scored 36 total points in the first half and 20 of them came in the, but they scored just six in the paint in the game's final 20 minutes.

Against The Wildcats

ND-Kentucky Hoops Notebook

Written by Sean Stires

Friday, 30 November 2012 06:58

Notre Dame's last win over a ranked Kentucky team came back in 1980. Notre Dame and Kentucky have met 60 previous times. The Wildcats lead the series 42-19. The Irish beat Kentucky 77-67 the last time the two teams met in the 2009 NIT quarterfinals.

Kentucky is now 5-3 all-time at Purcell Pavilion, while Brey improves to 2-5 against the Wildcats.

This is Notre Dame's second appearance in the SEC/Big East Challenge. The last time was in 2010 when the Irish lost 72-58 to Kentucky at Louisville's Freedom Hall.

At Home And In November

Notre Dame is now 46-0 in the month of November under Brey. The Fighting Irish have won 49 straight home games in November. Their last November loss was on Nov. 13, 1998 – a 76-65 setback to Miami (OH).

The Irish are 106-7 in their last 113 home games and have won 41 of their last 42 home games. They have a current 12-game home court winning streak, including 24 consecutive non-conference home games. ND is 65-1 in their last 66 non-league home games. Their last home non-conference loss was an 87-85 decision to Loyola Marymount on Dec. 12, 2009.

The 400

Tonight's game was Brey's 400th on the Notre Dame bench. He has a record of 267-133 in his 13 seasons. The game was also the 550th of his overall career. He is 365-185 combined at Notre Dame and Delaware.

Back In Black

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Notre Dame wore special black uniforms for Thursday's game. The Irish wore black alternate jerseys in 2006-2010 and went 10-12 while wearing them. There were mixed reviews on the look of the uniforms, which included green trim around black numbers – making the digits hard to read. Even harder, if not impossible to decipher from more than 10 feet away, were players' names on the back of the jerseys, which were stenciled in blue.

"That's the first I've seen them," Brey said of the uniforms. "I knew we were going with the black and with the green trim. The ones we had before a couple years ago were brighter green around the number. It's almost like our secret agent uniforms. You just don't know who's who. I tell you what, our guys love them and the guys we're recruiting love them, so we're gonna keep wearing them on the road."

"I haven't worn a black uniform in a long time," Martin said after the game. "I like these. These are pretty cool. They have a good record so far, so hopefully we'll keep it that way."

Notre Dame lost 74-73 to Rutgers in their last previous game in black on Jan. 30, 2010.