The Notre Dame basketball team is on a roll. The Fighting Irish (8-1) have won six straight since their Nov. 16 overtime loss to St. Joseph's and it is no small coincidence that their own recent fortunes have coincided with the on court play of Eric Atkins.

The point guard totaled just 12 points and nine assists in Notre Dame's wins over Evansville and Monmouth to start the season. Even worse were Atkins' five turnovers and five combined fouls in those two victories.

The junior started to turn things around in that loss to the Hawks in Brooklyn though, when he scored 12 points and dished-out 10 assists in Notre Dame's only loss of the year to date. He has kept things rolling since then with a much steadier hand.

"I'm just trying to be smart with the ball and just keep being aggressive," Atkins said after Saturday's 84-57 win over Brown. "Not turning the ball over is something I've always prided myself on. I honestly just wanted to be more aggressive this year, but it's actually turned out that I've been getting more assists and less turnovers."

Atkins has committed just one turnover in his last four games. That one miscue came in his 16-point effort in the 64-50 win over then No. 8 Kentucky nearly two weeks ago. A big key for the Irish at the offensive end of the court has been Atkins' ability to penetrate and dish.

“It kind of gives us another element offensively, especially to start the game,” head coach Mike Brey said of Atkins’ penetrating ability. “I think Eric in the past has started a game being his efficient self (by) running the team, not turning it over and trying to get other guys going. Then if we stall he kind of says ‘ok I need to do something’. I kind of like that he is looking for his stuff as well as getting people involved to start the game.”

Atkins had 10 points, 12 assists and no turnovers in Saturday’s win over Brown. It was the third double-double of the season and of his career. His other double-double, 13 points and 11 rebounds, came in a 92-65 win over Chicago State just prior to the Kentucky game.

An offseason of hitting the weights has also benefitted the 182 pound junior, especially when it comes to getting into and keeping opponents out of the lane.

“He’s gotten stronger,” Brey said recently of Atkins. “He’s able to keep people in front of him and body people up (and) put his chest on people when they’re trying to drive by him. I think he’s come a long way there. It helps him with his strength to get over ball screens, which we see so much in the game today and especially in the Big East.”

“It’s made him a better defender,” Brey continues. “He’s always been a solid rebounder. You look at his numbers; he gets his hands on those long rebounds for us too. I think his strength, and again just the growth of a guy being older now, has helped him.

Atkins recent run has him averaging 10.9 points, which is third on the team behind Jack Cooley’s 14.2 and Jerian Grant’s 12.9 averages. He is also averaging a more than healthy 7.0 assists with just 1.3 turnovers a game.

“I think in practice the coaches really hand the ball over to me and let me run the show right now,” Atkins commented of his recent strides. “I think my confidence is at a high right now and when I have the ball I feel like I can score any time I want to or find the open man.”

The other Fighting Irish player whose game has taken off in recent weeks in Cameron Biedscheid. The freshman scored a total of 29 points in the first five games of his career, but he netted a season-best 17 points in Saturday's win over Brown.

"I' m really getting a lot of help from veteran guys," Biedscheid said afterward. "They really talk to me a lot out there on the floor and it's really helped keep me focused. I've been stepping up and knocking down shots that I'm getting."

The 17-point effort against the Bears marked the fourth double-digit scoring effort in his last four games for the 6-foot-7 freshman. He scored 10 points in 17 minutes in the win over Kentucky, had a nine-point game (all on three-pointers) against Chicago State and netted 13 prior to that against St. Francis.

The St. Louis native started his career a miserable 2-for-17 from three-point range, but he never stopped shooting. Biedscheid's recent hot scoring stretch is thanks in large part to a blistering 11-for-18 (61%) clip from beyond the three-point arc over his last four games.

"He is a gifted offensive guy," Brey said recently of Biedscheid. "The game shooting stats, up until this last stretch, the 2-for-17, was really kind of just a weird thing, because in practice he makes big shots. He's the one guy I'd say more than anybody on our team right now, (that) I'm more surprised when he misses an open shot than anybody else. Atkins would be a close second lately."

Biedscheid stands 6-foot-7, but is listed at just 187 pounds. By comparison, he has just five pounds on the 6-foot-2 Atkins. The slender swingman had never lifted a weight in his life though prior to arriving on campus last summer.

"He's gained 12 to 13 (pounds) just in the summer," Brey marveled. "This is another example of why I felt good about him and it's played out. (Strength coach) Tony Rolinski told me two weeks into the summer 'I love Biedscheid'. I was a little surprised, because, we've had guys like him that have taken a while to understand the weight room. He said he is so competitive in the weight room."

“He wants to get stronger,” Brey continued. “He’s looking at Jerian (Grant) and competing with him. Those were all good signs. I think he’s seen the dividends now of how important that is. He wants to be a great player, so he has been so open to being taught how to play with other good players.”

As with most college students, Brey says Biedscheid still has a ways to go when it comes to understanding the importance of good nutrition, calling it a ‘work in progress’, but he expects that to come with time. Consistency will be the key for the freshman on the court, especially once he starts seeing more talented and physical players in the Big East. Brey still sees big upside for Biedscheid though.

“He is such a gamer,” Brey said of the freshman who has averaged 12.2 points over ND’s last four games.”For him in that atmosphere the other night (against Kentucky) to be so mentally prepared to deliver for us – really I respect that. He’s defensive rebounding for us. There’s a lot there and you just feel he’s gonna get better and even give you more.”

“The guy wants to be good, he knows what his weaknesses are and he’s very teachable and I’m so pleased with that, because I thought it would be harder still now.”

Biedscheid is currently averaging 9.0 points and 1.8 rebounds while playing in all nine games for the Irish. He is 13-for-51 (37%) from three-point range.

The Irish have finals this week and will next face Purdue this Saturday in the Crossroads Classic at Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis.