



NOTRE DAME, Ind. – The ever changing world of college athletics just keeps on changing. Keeping track of what school is in which conference (and for which sports) gets harder by the minute. It got even harder with the recent reports of seven schools – Georgetown, Providence, St. John's, Seton Hall, Villanova, DePaul, and Marquette – ready to leave the Big East to form a new basketball only conference.

Notre Dame already announced earlier this fall that its Olympic sports will leave the Big East to head for the ACC. The original agreement called for the Irish to join its new conference in 2014, but Fighting Irish basketball coach Mike Brey says the recent news of the seven other Catholic schools being ready to bolt could push forward ND's departure.

"I think it could expedite it to next year quite frankly," Brey said during his weekly teleconference on Thursday. "No one's told me that here, but my feeling is with the way things are going maybe we are in the ACC next year. I would think we would know something in a month on what league we're gonna play in."

The presidents of the seven schools recently met with Big East Commissioner Mike Aresco and are expected to issue a statement on their future in the conference within the next 48 hours. The Big East has long been a conference close to Brey's heart due to his east coast background.

Mike Brey Notebook

Written by Sean Stires

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“I love the Big East,” Brey continued. “We’ll play and have fun in it and we’ll get to the ACC whenever, but when I look at the climate right now with the Big East, maybe that does get us there next year.”

Brey was told to plan on playing in the Big East for two more seasons after the move to the ACC was announced in September. However, seven schools going elsewhere would drastically alter scheduling, especially when it comes to non-conference scheduling.

“If we’re trending toward the ACC how do we want to schedule non-league, and that’s a discussion we had yesterday as a staff,” Brey said of what he called a ‘tricky’ situation. “I would hope we would know something in a month, because we do have to plan and the ACC has to make a schedule up, so we’ll figure it out, but stay tuned.”

Sherman’s Back

Garrick Sherman missed last Saturday’s 84-57 win over Brown with a knee injury, but Brey says the reserve center is back in action and ready to play when the Irish face Purdue on Saturday in Indianapolis. Sherman has been action and practicing throughout the week, including a Wednesday workout with a familiar face.

“We actually scrimmaged and Luke Harangody was back and practiced with us as he’s getting himself healthy,” Brey said. “He and Garrick were going at it a little bit, but he (Sherman) is back and ready to roll.”

Sherman, who sat out last season after transferring from Michigan State, is Notre Dame’s fourth-leading scorer at 10.1 points a game. He is also the team’s third-leading rebounder with a 4.6 average. However, Sherman’s 16 turnovers are second to the 21 committed by Jerian Grant, who has played in one more game than Sherman and averages about 17 more minutes a game than the big man.

“We need him for us to move forward,” Brey said of Sherman. “He’s the guy. We’re gonna need Garrick taking better care of the ball and playing on all cylinders for us to be our best.”

Sherman's lone start this season came when Scott Martin sat with a sore knee of his own. His .615 field goal percentage is tops on the team.

Connaughton Evolving

It's far from a sophomore slump, but after a solid freshman season that saw him average 7.0 points and 4.4 rebounds, Pat Connaughton is yet to take off so far this season. The sophomore's contributions, 7.0 points and 4.2 boards, are nearly identical to his first year averages. While his scoring and rebounds are virtually unchanged, Connaughton has added a new element to his game this season.

"He's become such a better passer this year," Brey said of the Arlington, MA native. "In a lot of ways he's driving and kicking to (Eric) Atkins and (Jerian) Grant more than them kicking to him and it's productive, because those two guys are shooting the heck out of the ball."

Connaughton totaled 30 assists in 34 games last season, but he already has 21 assists through nine games this year. His 3-point percentage is down slightly at 31% (14-of-45) from 34% last year, but Brey says Connaughton has also emerged as ND's "defensive guy" on the perimeter.

Steady Jack

Jack Cooley has turned into a walking double-double. The senior is averaging team-highs of 14.2 points and 11.3 rebounds through nine games. The steady production is something that can almost be taken for granted now after Cooley went from a 3.5/3.1 player two years ago to averages of 12.5 and 8.9 last year.

"I think you can do that sometimes," Brey said of taking for granted Cooley's steady production. "I think I'm always mindful of when we're watching film or talking to him or talking to our team to really make everybody understand and appreciate what this guy gives us and the physicality that he deals with night-in and night-out."

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Brey said he considers the 6-foot-9 center the “best rebounder in college basketball”. Cooley’s 5.3 offensive rebounds a game lead the nation, while his 11.3 total rebounds ranks seventh nationally.