

No Sentimental Journey For Martin vs. Purdue

Written by Sean Stires

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NOTRE DAME, Ind. – It has been nearly nine years since Notre Dame and Purdue last met on the basketball court. Maybe it is fitting that Fighting Irish sixth-year senior Scott Martin's last season will finally include a clash with the program where his college basketball career began.

Martin, a Valparaiso, IN native, played for just one season at Purdue as a freshman during the 2007-2008 campaign. That time is a distant memory for the current Fighting Irish captain, and he has no real sentimentality as he prepares to face the Boilermakers (4-5) this Saturday afternoon in downtown Indianapolis.

"I don't see it as anything different than us going down there and playing IU last year," Martin said without a trace of nostalgia. "I don't really know any of the guys on the team now, so it's not like I'm going back and playing a bunch of guys I've played with before.

"It's just like going down there and playing IU," he reiterated. "It's gonna be a great atmosphere. Everyone's gonna be a little amped-up, so I'm excited for it."

The last time Notre Dame and Purdue squared-off on the hardwoods was on St. Patrick's Day in 2004 in what turned into a 12-point NIT victory. It would be almost four years until Martin would wear a Boilermaker uniform. Fighting Irish head coach Mike Brey is not concerned about Martin's focus when the teams meet this weekend.

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“He’ll be stable during it,” Brey estimated. “If it was a younger player in this situation I would be more concerned, but Scott’s had a lot of experiences here. He also knows he’s gotta be rock solid, because he’s our captain and our guys really look to him.”

“We had some good times with some big wins,” Martin recalled of his days at Purdue. “I had a lot of friends that went to Purdue from high school. There were definitely some good days at Purdue. I enjoyed myself there.”

Martin and Valparaiso High School teammate Robbie Hummel were highly sought after recruits in their prep days and Purdue and Notre Dame were among the many suitors for both of their basketball talents. Both landed in West Lafayette out of high school, but Brey says that might not have been the case if his own recruiting focus had been a little different six-plus years ago.

“We should have focused just on Scott Martin instead of recruiting both Hummel and him,” Brey lamented this week. “I think we would have got him if we would have done that, but we ended up getting him anyway. We should have put our sole focus right there.”

Hummel ended his Purdue career as the school’s ninth all-time leader scorer and fourth-best rebounder. Not only did he and Martin star together at Valpo high, but also in the summer where Brey saw plenty of them.

“They had a heck of an AAU team and they really knew how to play together,” Brey recalled. “I loved watching them beat people, because they played the right way on the AAU circuit against teams that were knuckleheads. It was fun to watch them win and beat people. I’m glad we got a do over and got a chance to coach him.”

While Brey believes a different recruiting approach may have altered Martin’s path to Notre Dame, Martin himself is not as sure.

“I would have made him work for it either way,” Martin joked this week when told of Brey’s

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comments. "I don't know. Rob was a great player. You just look at what he did there. I don't think you have much of a choice. You have to recruit Rob Hummel if Rob Hummel can be sought after."

"I don't know," Martin continued. "I don't really want to worry about hypotheticals and that sort of thing. We'll just leave it at Rob was a hell of a player and you've gotta recruit him."

Hummel is currently playing professionally in Spain after finishing his collegiate career last year. Like his old high school and AAU teammate, Hummel suffered a severe knee injury that slowed his college career.

Martin averaged 8.5 points, primarily as a reserve, as a freshman at Purdue. He sat out the 2008-'09 season after transferring to Notre Dame and then missed the following season after tearing an ACL, the same injury Hummel would suffer a year later, just before the season began.

Martin now has four-plus years and a degree under his belt since leaving Purdue and head coach Matt Painter behind, and he considers himself a much different person and player now than when he first walked in the Joyce Center doors.

"I think I'm definitely more confident in myself," Martin appraised. "I believe in what it is I do out there and how I help the team win. Other than that I don't know if there's much difference. Maybe I'm a bit more aggressive now than I was. Defensively I'm definitely much better than I was when I was there."

"I'm much smarter. I think it is those four or five years that have helped me mature and I'm definitely stronger too, that's for sure."

Painter, no doubt, was not happy when Martin hit the road, especially for a new home not far from West Lafayette. The Fighting Irish captain has no hard feelings for his old head coach though.

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“It didn’t work out,” Martin said of his stay at Purdue. “I don’t think anyone was too thrilled, but it’s just the way things happened and I don’t think anybody’s bitter about it or anything like that.”

Brey is now in his 13th season at Notre Dame, while Painter is coaching his eighth season on the Boilermaker bench. Martin and Hummel are not the first recruits the two veterans have fought for, but Brey says they continue to keep a friendly relationship.

“I have the utmost respect for Matt,” Brey said of Painter. “Matt’s done a heck of a job with his program. He’s a good friend. When you coach in this state as long as he and I have – we’ve spent a lot of time together in the same gyms on the same circuit.”

Purdue has struggled this season since losing Hummel to graduation. The Boilermakers have losses to Bucknell, Oregon State, Villanova, Xavier, and most recently Eastern Michigan heading into Saturday’s game against the Irish.

Their defense is solid though. Purdue’s opponents are shooting just 37% from the field and just below 27% from behind the three-point line and they yield 58 points a game.

“They do what they do,” Brey began of Purdue’s defensive prowess. “They’re gonna guard you, they’re gonna play really hard and Purdue is gonna do what they do under Matt. They always have (and) always will.”

Saturday’s game in Indianapolis will take place exactly 96 years to the day after the first-ever game played between the intrastate rivals. They have played a total of 40 times over the years, with each school claiming 20 wins.

No. 1 Indiana and Butler will tip-off at 2 p.m. ET in the first game of the Close the Gap Crossroads Classic at Bankers Life Fieldhouse. That game will be on CBS, while the Notre Dame-Purdue game is on ESPN2.