

## Irish Look To Rebound After Loss

Written by Sean Stires

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After seeing two streaks come to an end simultaneously in Saturday's 65-58 loss to Connecticut, the Notre Dame basketball team must prep for a quick turnaround with a trip to New York City to face St. John's Tuesday night. The Irish saw both their 12-game winning streak as well as their 17-game home court winning streak with Saturday's loss to the Huskies.

Madison Square Garden will again be the site of the Notre Dame – St. John's clash in NYC. The Garden has been Notre Dame's Temple of Doom in recent years in regular season matchups with the Red Storm.

"The reasons we haven't played well there is they've pressured us," Irish head coach Mike Brey said of his team's struggles against St. John's at MSG. "We've turned the ball over there. We had won nine in a row the last time we were in there and they snapped it. They're gonna play that zone, but they've got the shot blocker back there. It's hard to get stuff around the bucket."

Chris Thomas was still wearing a Notre Dame uniform the last time Notre Dame beat St. John's at Madison Square Garden. The former Irish point guard hit six 3-pointers en-route to a 25-point day as Notre Dame downed the Red Storm 89-62 to close the 2003-2004 regular season with a victory.

The Fighting Irish have dropped their last four games to St. John's at Madison Square Garden since that game by an average of 7.5 points. They fell 61-58 on Feb. 25, 2012 in their most

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recent clash in the famed arena to their Big East rivals. They have gone 4-3 though on the same court in Big East Tournament play over the last three seasons.

Chris Obekpa leads St. John's (9-7, 1-3 Big East) with 82 blocks. The 6'9" freshman from Nigeria is second in the nation with 5.07 blocks per game. He is averaging just 4.3 points and 6.1 rebounds, but his presence will make things difficult for Notre Dame senior Jack Cooley, who was solid with 14 points and nine rebounds in the loss to UConn, but he was still never able to find a solid rhythm inside while shooting just 7-of-12 from the field.

Cooley, ever the realist, commented after the tough loss that St. John's will be a tough test for him and his teammates.

"Just realizing in the Big East no team is easy," Cooley said after Saturday's loss of how the Irish must bounce back on Tuesday in New York. "We just have to recognize that and go forward and realize that we can bet the rest of the teams in front of us. We've just got to play our hardest."

D'Angelo Harrison leads the Red Storm and is second in the Big East with 20.6 points a game. He was the Big East's second-leading returning scorer this season after averaging 17.0 points last year (tops among all Big East freshman in 2011-2012). He has also knocked-down 37-of-111 3-pointers (33%).

"We're gonna have to knock-down some shots against them and then we're gonna have to guard some guys that can go," Brey said of the defensive challenge of facing St. John's. "It's coming at us. It's that Big East...defend ball screens, defend guys that are going to try to take you off the dribble."

Harrison is joined in the backcourt by Chicago native Phil Green, IV. The 6'2" sophomore point guard averages 8.9 points and 2.9 assists. JaKarr Sampson, a 6'8" slasher gives St. John's even more athleticism and a 13.6 scoring average. He also leads his team with 6.8 rebounds a game.

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After dropping its Big East opener to Villanova in overtime, St. John's knocked-off Cincinnati 53-52, but has dropped its last two conference games to Rutgers and Georgetown. Brey says when it's all said and done bouncing-back in the Big East is more about mental toughness than anything.

"One of the things I told them in the locker room that last time we lost we had a great bounce-back in less than 24 hours against BYU," Brey said. "We were under the gun, down 47-40. Now we are going to a place where we got beat last year. We exercised some demons Monday at a place we got beat last year (Cincinnati). Maybe we can do that again. This league is all about how you can bounce back."

Tuesday's Notre Dame – St. John's game is set for a 7:00 p.m. ET tip-off and will be televised on ESPN2.

### Baseline Bits

Notre Dame shot just .429 (24-of-56) from the floor in Saturday's loss to UConn thanks to a strong defensive effort from the Huskies' guards. The Irish had shot at least 50% in their five previous games.

Conversely, UConn shot .509 (27-of-53) for the best shooting day by an Irish opponent all season. Unheralded 6'9" Tyler Olander led the way by shooting 8-for-9 for a career-high 16 points.

Saturday's game also marked the first time Notre Dame lost a game after leading at halftime. The Irish held a slim 31-29 advantage after the game's first 20 minutes.

The Irish shot 6-of-13 (46%) from three-point range on Saturday. ND has made at least one three in 458 consecutive games. Cameron Biedscheid hit the only three-pointer he attempted against the Huskies. The freshman has made seven consecutive treys over the last three games.