Mike Brey and his Notre Dame basketball team narrowly escaped what would have been the disaster of the season on Saturday night. The Irish twice led Rutgers by 13 points in the second half of Saturday's game at Purcell Pavilion at the Joyce Center, but the lead shrank all the way to a single point with 5.7 seconds left before the Irish finally escaped with a 69-66 victory.

A loss to a solid Rutgers (12-5, 3-3 Big East) team would not have been singularly devastating, but such an implosion, combined with the two lackluster defeats that came before it to UConn and St. John's, could easily have set a downward spiral in motion to what began as a 14-1 season for the Fighting Irish (15-3, 3-2).

"I told them it's going to be hard in this league," Brey said after the win that showed a steely resolve from his team. "Things are going to be hard – and just to remind them – not that this group doesn't know about hard stuff, but you have to fight them off after turning it over a little bit."

Notre Dame committed an uncharacteristic 16 turnovers in the game – almost as many as the 21 total they had in their back-to-back losses to Connecticut and St. John's and well above their 10.8 season average. Notre Dame's five starters averaged 36 minutes in the win. Brey has always leaned heavily on his veterans, but it was even more in evidence with a tighter rotation against the Scarlet Knights.

“I think (Cameron) Biedscheid’s gotta give us more,” Brey said after the game. “He played 24 minutes in New York, but tonight he just wasn’t strong enough with the ball against some older guards and it was a night where we had to get this one, and so our men had to play.”

Biedscheid played just 11 minutes Saturday. He was 0-for-3 from the field and had a pair of turnovers in his brief time off the bench. Tom Knight was the only other player to come off the bench. The senior was 2-for-2 at the free throw line and 2-for-3 from the floor in nine minutes. Brey’s voice filled Knight’s ears after he missed his only shot.

“The shot he took in the first half was took quick,” Brey said of the 15-footer Knight missed. “But the ones in the second half were after we moved the ball a little bit. “He’s confident and we need to keep building with him.”

Knight is averaging just 6.5 minutes, while Biedscheid’s time has been more at 17.0 a game. Brey added Zach Auguste, averaging 6.7 minutes, as someone he has an ‘open mind’ about using more down the stretch in Big East action.

The player that has done a disappearing act over the last three games is Scott Martin. The Valparaiso native took just four shots and ended with just four points Saturday night. He is a combined 2-for-9 from the field and 0-for-4 on three-pointers with a total of 7.0 points and five fouls while averaging 32.0 minutes in his last three games. Brey sees much more value in Martin’s floor presence than scoring though.

“I don’t want to over-analyze that with him,” Brey said when asked what it would take to get Martin going offensively. “We’re not going to run stuff for him to score. When he scores for us it’s when the defense helps off of him and he’s gotten an open look.”

“He’s really our most vocal guy when we’re trying to get the ball in against pressure,” Brey continued. “We need him for that.”

Notre Dame is one of five Big East teams ranked in the top 25 in either the AP or Coaches’ Poll this week. Monday’s opponent, Georgetown, is just outside both rankings. No. 6 Syracuse just

knocked-off No. 1 Louisville Saturday afternoon to improve to 5-0 in conference play. Louisville and Marquette are next in the rankings with identical 4-1 conference marks. Notre Dame is one of eight teams that begin to bunch up in the middle of the standings – making each passing game – especially home games – more important.

“When you have 14 teams, I think we had 14 teams in the top 100 of the RPI, there’s no easy (games),” Brey said of the conference grind the Irish are now entering in the season. “Everybody can play in that next level.”

“Everybody can play, so I think what’s good is that’s going to keep our league RPI up and make us be in the vicinity of getting eight (NCAA Tournament) bids. I think that’s a good thing. Other than those two right now (Louisville and Syracuse) the rest of us are fighting for our lives, so that’s why a night like tonight – I am thrilled to escape with one.”

Georgetown (12-4, 2-3) is coming off a 61-58 loss at South Florida on Saturday. The Hoyas’ two conference wins have come against Providence and at St. John’s. Georgetown is led in scoring and rebounding (14.3/7.6) by 6’8” forward Otto Porter, Jr. Forward Greg Whittington and guard Markel Starks are averaging double figures as well with respective averages of 12.1 and 11.4 points.