

Notre Dame - Louisville Preview

Written by Sean Stires
Friday, 08 February 2013 10:34



If history repeats itself - again - fans that flock to Purcell Pavilion for Saturday night's 9 p.m. ET tip to watch Notre Dame and Louisville could be in for a long stay. Four of the last five and five of the last seven meetings between No. 25 Notre Dame (18-5, 6-4 Big East) and No. 11 Louisville (19-4, 7-3) have gone to overtime. Irish head coach and Louisville's Rick Pitino have turned it into a running punch line whenever they meet either before their games or on the recruiting trail.

"One of us usually says how many we wanna play tonight," Brey joked this week. "One, two...you know five extra (periods). It's like a running joke when we're recruiting in the summer, but there have just been great games, just really good games."

The Fighting Irish and Cardinals have gone to double-overtime twice in recent years, including the 67-65 Irish win in Louisville on Jan. 7 last season. The two teams have played 10 times since Louisville joined the Big East in 2005 and six of those meetings have needed at least one extra session to decide the outcome.

Notre Dame is 2-2 against Louisville in their last four overtime meetings, but the Irish do hold a 3-0 home court advantage in the series since the Cardinals joined the Big East. The last time the Cardinals beat the Fighting Irish in South Bend was on Feb. 26, 1994. While neither Brey nor Pitino was yet affiliated with either of their current schools at that time, that game was also decided in overtime.

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Russ Smith is Louisville's leading scorer with an 18.2 average. Smith scored 20 and 18 points in wins over Pittsburgh and Marquette, respectively, before scoring 14 points while shooting 3-for-11 in Wednesday's 68-48 win over Rutgers.

Smith, a 6'0" junior from Brooklyn, set a Louisville school single-season record for steals with 87 last season. He teams with point guard Peyton Siva, a rare senior (especially for a Pitino team), to form one of the best backcourts in the Big East. Siva is Louisville's second-leading scorer at 10.6 points a game. He is also tied with Notre Dame's Eric Atkins at 3rd in the conference with 6.1 assists.

Brey has referred to the Big East as a "ball screen league", and the veteran Siva is at the top of the ball screen class.

"One night I was saying 'boy we were really good in our ball screen defense'," Brey recalled. "(Irish assistant) Martin Inglesby got me back to earth. He said 'that wasn't Siva we were dealing with'. I said 'that's a good point'. This guy's the hardest guy to deal with off the ball screen when he's in a good flow and confident."

Siva, who has hit 53-of-61 free throws (86%) this season, was just named one of 12 national finalists for the 2013 Bob Cousy Point Guard of the Year Award. Syracuse's Michael Carter-Williams is the only other Big East point guard who is among the top 12 on the Cousy list.

Like Notre Dame's last opponent, Syracuse, Louisville will play a zone defense. The Irish struggled on Monday in the Carrier Dome in their 63-47 loss to the Orange, shooting just 34% from the field in the game. That dismal stat included an 8-for-29 (27%) second half. Brey says there is a tangible difference though in the zones employed by Syracuse and Louisville.

"The one thing that's maybe different between the two zones is the guys at Syracuse are a lot bigger than the guys up top (at Louisville)," Brey said. "We could not get an elbow (shot). We have a set that we like to run called 'four flash' where we like to hit an elbow guy. We couldn't make that pass a lot of times, because of their length."

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The length comes from guards like Williams-Carter and Brandon Triche. The former is one of the taller point guards in the nation at 6'6", while the latter is 6'4". Meanwhile, both Smith and Siva stand a more modest 6-foot tall.

"The first thing we've gotta do is make some shots," Brey said of the key to attacking the zone. "You don't want to thoroughly overanalyze this thing. You've gotta make some shots over the top of a 2-3 zone to have success against a team that plays it a lot. When we've had success playing against zone I think you've gotta make eight-plus threes."

The Irish shot just 6-for-20 (30%) from long range in the loss to Syracuse. That setback ended a three-game win streak that started with Brey's new-look lineup featuring Tom Knight. The senior has made four consecutive starts (his only starts this season) with Scott Martin out due to knee troubles. Martin has been out since a humbling 63-47 home loss to Georgetown on Jan. 21.

"I really have loved how our group has come together after the Georgetown game," Brey commented. "We were up against it right then. (We are now) playing bigger with Tom. Certainly, Tom has given us great energy and a great lift. Playing two big guys has made us more physical. For us to get three out of four with Scott down - I'm thrilled right now to be in the position we're in given Scott Martin's situation."

Notre Dame had a chance to move into second place in the Big East if they had beaten Syracuse last Monday. Instead, the loss has the Irish tied with Cincinnati for sixth place in the current conference standings. Syracuse, one of three teams to hold first place in the league over the last couple weeks, is currently in first place.

"Our league continues to be the drama queen league," Brey joked of the up and down nature of the Big East race. "And (it is) the most watched league. It's just amazing what's going on. We're right in the thick of this thing."

"I think it's going to be an interesting stretch run here," Brey continued. "With what you've seen happen with top teams - teams that were picked in the top three or four of the preseason Big East poll getting nailed."

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All but two teams (DePaul and South Florida) in the Big East currently have overall winning records. Just five of the 15 teams in the conference have sub-.500 league records. Providence (12-11, 4-7) is one of those teams, but the Friars have a top-100 RPI after Wednesday's 54-50 upset of Cincinnati.

ESPN's College GameDay is on campus this weekend for the lead-up to Saturday night's Notre Dame-Louisville game. Notre Dame students will be camping out in the Joyce Center Fieldhouse Friday night in preparation for Saturday morning's GameDay broadcast that begins at 10 a.m. ET. There will be a Sportscenter live look-in at 9 a.m.

Brey will stop by the campout at 7:15 a.m. to deliver the students breakfast. Doors to Purcell Pavilion open to students at 8:15 a.m. Saturday, with entry to the general public beginning at 8:30 a.m. Brey will join the GameDay broadcast at about 10:30 a.m. The Irish will be on the Purcell Pavilion court from 11:10-11:15 am and Jack Cooley and Jerian Grant will do a "Know Your Teammate" segment that will air between 11:40-11:45 am.