

ND-Louisville 5 OT Notebook

Written by Sean Stires

Sunday, 10 February 2013 11:22



NOTRE DAME, Ind. - Mere words can only begin to do justice to the spectacle that began Saturday night and ended in the early Sunday morning hours at Purcell Pavilion at the Joyce Center. Before we proceed though let's make one thing clear - the game that ended with Notre Dame beating Louisville 104-101 in five overtimes was barely even a good game, let alone great, until Jerian Grant caught fire for the Irish with 44 seconds to play in regulation.

"Where do you want me to start," Irish head coach Mike Brey asked before even finding his seat for the press conference that followed the instant classic. "Because I don't know where to start. Unbelievable. I'm really proud of my team, because many times we were down in the overtime and kept fighting back. Everybody was part of it tonight. It's one of those magical nights in our building."

Just how "magical" was it? Consider this - with 44 seconds left in regulation Grant was 0-for-6 from the field, while teammate Garrick Sherman was buried on the bench looking like he would go a fifth game since Jan. 19 without seeing the floor. By the time the game ended the two had combined to go 11-for-21 with 36 points or nearly a third of their team's 104 points.

The first shot Grant made was a three-pointer that cut Notre Dame's deficit to five points with 44 seconds to play. He made two more threes on successive trips down court after Louisville free throws, and then an old fashioned three-point play after a layup and a free throw with that tied the game 60-60 with 16.2 seconds left in regulation.

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"It's one of those things," Grant began when asked if he had ever gone from so cold to so hot in such a short amount of time. "I was frustrated all game with myself missing easy shots. I just really didn't want my team to lose. I just felt like I willed us into overtime."

Before any of that happened though, both teams were mired in horrific shooting slumps. Grant's first trey ended a span of nearly 11 minutes without a field goal for the Irish. The Irish had scored 11 straight points prior to that from the free throw line. Louisville also had its own shooting slump, with a nearly seven minute stretch without a basketball that ended with 1:25 left in regulation.

Grant started the scoring in the first overtime with a pair of free throws, but would foul out with 1:57 on the clock in that period. Make no mistake though - the Irish would have been in the showers long before midnight if not for Grant's efforts.

"I've never seen anything like that," Brey said of Grant's lightning-like scoring performance. I was about to strangle him for his play up until that point and what he did there was amazing. He hits tough shots a lot, but to do that, because people are going up the aisles - they were starting to leave. I'm thinking 'what's the speech' (in the locker room) - (if) we lose this one how do we bounce back?"

Bouncing back was something Sherman was asked to do in short fashion after both Jack Cooley and Tom Knight had fouled out. Sherman rode the bench for the duration of his team's last two games against DePaul and Syracuse after totaling 18 minutes in wins over South Florida and Villanova. He missed the Rutgers and Georgetown games before that as well.

"It's honestly really hard to explain," the little used Sherman said after his most important effort of the season that almost never happened. "I don't really know how my emotions feel right now. I'm just happy we won. I couldn't even go through the plays with you right now. I don't even remember what happened. I was just out there."

He was more than just "out there" though. Sherman was in there - in the thick of the mix with the teams trading leads and sharing ties over the game's final 22 minutes that stretched the five overtimes and crossed from late night to early morning.

Sherman's first few shots were short as he battled 6'11" Gorgui Dieng in the post until the Senegal native finally fouled out early in the fifth OT.

"There's no secret, it's just a war," Sherman said of going toe-to-toe with Dieng, who finished with 17 points, in the paint. "You have to be physical with him. He is a big strong guy. It was just an all out battle down there."

Sherman missed a pair of free throws after his first made basket, but he gained steam through overtimes three and four - scoring six points in each of those five minute periods. He finished 7-of-10 from the field and 3-of-6 at the line to finish one point shy of his career-high. His 17 points were also one short of his total production over Notre Dame's 11 previous games - dating back to Dec. 21 against Niagara.

"I can't say enough about him," Brey said of Sherman's effort. "He was a little bit of a forgotten guy. It's really something to build on, because a lot of guys were part of this."

"I think he has great teammates," Brey continued of what kept Sherman going through his tough stretch prior to Saturday. "Jack Cooley, (Eric) Atkins and Grant are really close with him. They kept his head up and our staff did a good job. Rod Balanis coaches our big guys. He got him in for some workouts during the day just to spend time with him. It's gonna come back around to you and it certainly did tonight and he delivered."

One For The Ages

When Notre Dame and Louisville play it is practically a given that the game will go to overtime. The two teams have now played 11 times since the Cardinals joined the Big East in 2005 and seven of those meetings have now gone to overtime. Five of those extra session contents have occurred in the last six ND-Louisville matchups, and three of those (including Saturdays 5 OT affair) have gone to at least two OTs.

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"What a fun night," Brey said of the game that had Purcell Pavilion rocking through five extra sessions. "I've been coaching a long time and you can count on one hand where you go 'that was magical - that was unbelievable', but we enjoyed the moment. We were having fun with it. We were laughing on the bench."

The game will go down as the first five-overtime game in the history of the Big East Conference. It was reminiscent of the 2009 Big East Tournament game between Connecticut and Syracuse that stretched to six overtimes. Several Irish players remembered watching that classic, but never really thought they would have a chance to be a part of something similar.

"You do as long as your team comes out on top with a win," Cooley said with a chuckle. "That game is going to be on ESPN Classic for the next week and a half, just on replay. It's gonna be great."

"You never think that it's gonna happen," Pat Connaughton said when asked if he ever dreamed of playing in such a game. "You never think that anything like that's gonna happen and then you're in one. Now it's like you wanna be the person that wins that game, because if you lose it you kind of did it all for nothing."

Connaughton finished with his second career double-double with 16 points and 14 boards in 56 minutes.

The All-DQ Team

A total of eight different players - four from each team - fouled out before the game's 65 minutes concluded. In addition to Dieng, Peyton Siva, Kevin Ware and Luke Hancock all fouled out for Louisville.

Cooley fouled out after scoring 11 points and pulling down 11 rebounds for his 16th double-double of the season. It marked the third time, including the second time at home, Cooley has been disqualified from a game this season.

"It was pretty bad to have to sit there and know that you almost let your team down," Cooley admitted afterward. "Then to watch the greatness going on was just phenomenal to see how well our team was playing, especially with the players that were out there. It just shows how well we practice and how much depth we have."

Knight, Grant and Zach Auguste, who finished with a career-high 36 minutes, all fouled as well.

Double Duty

Notre Dame and Louisville players saw extra duty in the long game, but one official got more than he bargained for by working the game as well. John Gaffney worked Marquette's 89-78 win over DePaul Saturday afternoon in Milwaukee and then drove to South Bend and worked the five OT game as well. Gaffney was pressed into extra duty, because an official that was originally scheduled to work the ND-Louisville game could not leave the east coast due to the blizzard that hit the region.

A Puncher's Mentality

Brey got his team in a boxing mode prior to the game. Someone had sent the Irish head coach a video highlight reel of great boxing knockouts and the team watched it together Friday night to harden their resolve prior to the big game with an athletic and physical Louisville team.

"I talked about it being a 15-rounder," Brey said of his message to his team before the game. "Taking punches and being put on the mat. At the fourth or fifth timeout I said 'has there ever been a 20-rounder'."

Brey continued the boxing theme throughout the night. He could be seen shadow boxing during timeouts.

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"In every timeout I was punching guys before, you know," Brey joked. "We're taking punches. We were using that as our comparison. That was our theme the whole time."

Apollo Creed told Rocky Balboa "Ain't gonna be no rematch" at the end of the first Rocky movie (of course there was one). This heavyweight tilt will have a rematch as well. Mark your calendar for March 9 when the Irish and Cardinals square-off in Louisville on the last day of the regular season.