Notre Dame gave opponents a taste of what it has seen most of the season – aggressive perimeter defense and great help rotation – en route to a 62-41 victory over Cincinnati. Equally important was ND's dominance on the boards, outworking the Big East's best rebounding team by a 43-27 margin.

Four Notre Dame players scored in double figures led by Jerian Grant's 13. Zach Auguste led the team with nine rebounds, a tally he earned in 12 minutes of playing time.

JaQuon Parker led the Bearcats with 12 points, but the team made only 17-54 shots from the field, 2-12 from three point range.

"I thought we did a great job of staying in front of people who wanted to beat us off the dribble," said Notre Dame head coach Mike Brey after the game. "We did a great job of keeping it to one and done. Add that to 40 minutes of very good offensive efficiency and you have a great team win.

"Maybe we're finding our identity on the defensive end of the floor and rebounding the basketball," Brey continued.

Pat Connaughton talked about the defensive work the team has been doing in practice. “It’s a lot of one-on-one defense… keeping our man in front of us, taking a lot of pride in it. They can’t win if they can’t score.”

The offensive efficiency was evident from the first Notre Dame’s first possession, a change from recent slow starts. Uncovered, Jack Cooley made a 14-foor set shot the first time ND had the ball. Cooley fed Tom Knight for a short jumper on the second trip down the floor, Pat Connaughton passed to Cooley for a layup on the third set, and Eric Atkins got the ball to Knight for a baseline jumper on the fifth trip.

JaQuon Parker had Cincinnati’s only answers before the first media timeout, a pair of short jumpers off of his right hand drive; and the score was 8-4 at the first break.

The game slowed for three minutes as both teams played defense with postseason intensity, but ND got its running game going around the 11:00 mark. Atkins fed Cameron Biedscheid in traffic for a layup, Jerian Grant hit Atkins on the wing for a three, and Grant took the ball the length of the court for an acrobatic layup to give the Irish a 19-6 lead.

Notre Dame was beating the Big East’s best rebounding team on the boards at that point by a 13-5 margin. Zach Auguste’s four rebounds led the seven ND players with notches in that column. His length and athleticism matched Cincinnati’s greatest strength. “It was good to see him being able to play,” said Cooley, “and we learned from the first game how to deal with their athletic front line.”

Cincinnati’s Shaquille Thomas finally stopped Notre Dame’s 16-2 run with a three point basket with 6:32 left in the half. The Irish answered quickly with a layup by Cooley on a nice feed from Knight, but UC countered with Sean Kilpatrick’s driving layup to make the game feel like a contest again.

The Bearcats sandwiched a pair of short baskets around an offensive foul on Cooley to cut the lead to 11 points, but Jerian Grant’s no-look, over the shoulder cross court pass to a wide open Pat Connaughton gave him a three point shot ahead of the halftime buzzer. Connaughton

delivered, and the Irish led 29-15 at halftime.

“Pat loves the corners,” said Grant. “When I’m driving to the basket, I know where he’s going to be.”

“I couldn’t see him,” said Connaughton. All I saw was the ball coming my way and I thought ‘I better make this.’”

Notre Dame continued to dominate the boards with a 21-11 first half advantage with Auguste in a starring role – eight boards in nine minutes. Cooley and Biedscheid added three apiece.

ND’s scoring was balanced – six points each for Connaughton, Knight and Cooley with Grant, Atkins, Biedscheid, and Sherman also in the scoring column. Thomas’ five points led Cincinnati. The Irish shot 50% for the half while UC made just 28% of its shots, 7-25 from the field.

The Bearcats started the second half defending the ball aggressively hoping to force turnovers and get their running game going; but Atkins had a pair of early answers to stretch the Notre Dame lead to 34-15. The first was a pretty length of the floor drive for a basket, and the second was a three point basket that Grant got him with a nice pass off of a drive into the lane.

“We’re trying not to make too great of a pass out of the double team,” Said Cooley. “Two passes later, we can make the scoring play. It’s great to see us translate from practice to games and be so successful.”

Successful was 18 assists on 22 baskets.

UC wasn’t ready to surrender. The press started causing turnovers that the Bearcats used to cut the lead to 34-23. Biedscheid’s three pointer stopped the run momentarily, but another steal led to Parker’s drive, Atkins’ second foul, and a free throw to cut the lead to 11 again. ND answered with a layup by Sherman’s layup. Next, UC ‘s Justin Jackson tipped in a Kilpatrick

miss. The pace was not what Brey wanted, and he told his team as much during the media timeout at 11:49 with the score at 39-28.

The Irish talked about pace during the break. Brey's message was "Just don't let them speed us up," Grant said. "When we get stops and rebounds and we play at our pace, the offense will come."

Cincinnati got the lead down to nine before the Irish started to handle the pressure well. Cooley powered a layup into the basket, got fouled, and made the free throw to restore the lead to 12 points with 10:17 left to play. Grant made four free throws; and Atkins penetrated, drew a defender, and passed to Cooley for a dunk to make it a 48-32 game at the media timeout with 7:33 to play. Atkins added a pair of free throws that extended the lead to 18.

Game over early.

Irish Notes

- Four Irish players scored in double figures. Grant led with 13. Knight added 12. Cooley and Atkins had 11 apiece.
- Grant made only 2-9 shots from the field, but he was 9-9 from the free throw line.
- The victory gave improved Notre Dame's record to 22-6, 10-5 in the Big East. It's the fourth consecutive season with a double digit conference victory tally and the sixth in seven years.
- The Irish are in fifth place in the Big East, a half game behind Marquette, their next opponent.
- 18 assists on 22 baskets improved ND to 67% of its baskets assisted during the Big East season.
- Eric Atkins led Notre Dame with four assists. He had only one turnover. "This is a big time match-up for us," Atkins said after the game. "Jerian and I come into the game wanting to win those types of battles against some of the top backcourts in the country."
- Tom Knight made six of his seven shot attempts. He added seven rebounds and three assists with no turnovers. There was nothing spectacular in his game; but it may have been his best at Notre Dame, especially given the quality of the opponent. "We're back. Let's keep this

going. Let’s keep building off of it,” he said. Good summary of the situation.

- One last thing... Propers to Cincinnati's Justin Jackson. With the game out of reach in the final minutes, jackson went over the first press table and landed on the middle table trying to save a ball going out of bounds. I respect a guy who competes to the end.