

ND-Louisville: Expect Drama

Written by Sean Stires
Friday, 08 March 2013 09:41



WARNING: Notre Dame - Louisville basketball game approaching. Expect high drama and...OVERTIME. That disclaimer will not be found on any ticket stubs this weekend when the Fighting Irish and Cardinals meet on the hardwood inside the KFC Yum! Center and there will likely be no such signs posted outside the arena, but there probably should be.

By now it is practically a given that a Notre Dame - Louisville game means overtime. That point was driven home five-fold in their classic 104-101 five overtime thriller, won by the Irish, nearly a month ago at Purcell Pavilion at the Joyce Center.

"It's one of those magical nights in our building," Irish head coach Mike Brey said in the afterglow of the longest regular season game in Big East history. "They were really good, hard to score on. I can't even remember all of the big plays different guys made to get us to where we're at with a win like that. We've had a lot of good wins in this building, but I can't remember one more thrilling or dramatic."

That is saying something, considering six of the last eight meetings between the Irish and Cardinals have gone to at least one overtime session. It goes back even deeper than that, with seven of 11 ND-Louisville matchups since the Cardinals joined the Big East in 2005 going to OT.

"It's become maybe our rivalry," Brey said this week of the Louisville series. "I think it's neat that

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we'll both end up in the ACC, because (of) the drama of the games. I think players on both teams talk about that in the offseason."

"I think our guys are just excited to play against them," Brey continued. "To play in that atmosphere and we are playing in a place where we've had success before."

The last three Notre Dame visits to Louisville have resulted in overtime games, including two that have stretched to double-overtime. The Irish prevailed 67-65 on Jan. 7 in last year's 2 OT affair in Louisville. After a shaky non-conference stretch that saw the team lose five times in November and December that win helped set the tone for a 13-5 Big East mark last year.

There is even more on the line this Saturday - the final day of the regular season for all Big East teams. A win by the Irish and a Syracuse loss to Georgetown would mean Notre Dame will grab the No. 4 seed and a double-bye at next week's Big East Tournament. The Orange and Hoyas tip at noon, but the result of that game will not change Brey's pregame message to his team in their 4 p.m. game.

"The Louisville games have been so exciting and so dramatic," Brey began. "This is a fun one. Let's go compete and let it rip and see what happens. When the smoke clears, we'll know what time we play on Wednesday or if it all falls Thursday."

Cameron Biedscheid will be suspended for Saturday's season finale for his part in the fight at the end of Tuesday's 66-40 win over St. John's. The freshman was one of six Irish players to score in double-figures (14 points) in the 5 OT victory last month. With Biedscheid out and with Scott Martin done for the season due to injury, the Irish bench will be stretched thin. With that in mind, Brey says Austin Burgett has to be ready to go.

"I'm excited to see that," Brey said of the opportunity Burgett may get down the stretch. "He's a guy that (has to) play more as a perimeter guy. I think his future for us is as a stretch four man ala Scott Martin and Rob Kurz. He's good with the ball, so as a third perimeter guy I'm not worried. This is the ultimate ball pressure. He can make a shot and he's athletic. He's gonna have to play some Saturday."

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Garrick Sherman came-up big in the five-overtime win as well. Sherman was 7 for 10 for 17 points, with all 22 of his minutes coming from the end of the first overtime on to help the Irish beat the Cardinals. He has scored just 22 total points in 70 total minutes in the six games since then though.

Never the less, Sherman played a vital role in the five overtime game. Jack Cooley and Jerian Grant, who combined for 30 points, had each fouled out before the Michigan State transfer had scored a point. Sherman's own resolve in that game is indicative of what Brey believes has been his team's trademark this season.

"There is a resiliency about this group," Brey said of what he has most learned about his team this season. "Through the course of a game if it's not going good, obviously the first half, if it's not going good they don't panic for the most part. They stay at it. Through the course of the season we've made adjustments through different things."

"I think that goes to maturity," the 13th-year Irish head coach continued. "I think we have really very good maturity on the team."

A lot of that maturity goes to Martin, who is still a presence on the bench throughout games despite his injury. The on court share goes to Jack Cooley though. The senior is averaging 13.8 points and 10.7 rebounds heading into the regular season finale. Two more wins will make him the leader of the winningest senior class in Notre Dame history.

"I like that we keep having senior classes breaking the previous senior class's record," Brey said of what it would to him to see this class achieve that distinction. "That means we're on a pretty good run. I know Jack and the rest of his classmates would really like to have that, because they want to throw it in the face of their former teammates and be able to talk about that."

Those who plan to watch Saturday's game should plan for drama and should not make any early evening plans.

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"It's going to be a great atmosphere down there," Brey continued. "We were fortunate enough to steal a win down there last time, so this group has played well there. We know we're going to get the shot of a real good team on Saturday."

Saturday's game is scheduled for a 4 p.m. EST tip-off. The game will be televised nationally on CBS.