

Irish Rout Chicago State

Written by Sean Stires

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NOTRE DAME, Ind. – Jerian Grant led six players in double figures with 22 points to lead a hot shooting Notre Dame team to a 92-65 win over Chicago State on Monday night at Purcell Pavilion at the Joyce Center. Grant missed just two shots from the field and dished-out 10 assists as well for his second double-double of the season in the convincing Irish victory.

“As a team and myself we really needed this going into our next game,” Grant said while eluding to Notre Dame’s (6-1) Thursday night home matchup with defending national champion Kentucky. “A lot of guys knocked down shots and we really feel good going into playing against Kentucky.”

Grant had one of his team’s three double-doubles on the evening. Eric Atkins had 13 points and 11 assists, while Jack Cooley scored 11 points and pulled down 11 rebounds in what he thought was his team’s most complete game of the season.

“It was on all cylinders,” Cooley said afterward. “We shot well from the free throw line and the three-point line. We hadn’t really shot well from either of those so far. That was really encouraging to see (and) two people in double-digit assists is pretty good to see.”

Neither team missed much in the game’s opening minutes. Scott Martin hit a pair of 3-pointers and Pat Connaughton added another for the Irish, while Clarke Rosenberg and Greg Tucker each hit from long range for the Cougars (1-6) in an 11-8 game over the first four-plus minutes.

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The teams were a combined 6-for-9 from the field in that span.

“We played a lot of zone tonight,” Irish head coach Mike Brey explained of the Cougars’ early three-point penchant. “Their guys put it up from out there and they made some early.”

Cam Biedscheid provided instant offense when he entered the game along with Garrick Sherman just after the first media timeout. Biedscheid took the in-bound pass and drilled a three right away. He nailed another one at the 12:09 mark to give the Irish a four-point lead after a Quinton Pippen three had cut ND’s lead to one.

By the time Eric Atkins sank his first three with 10:03 to play in the half a total of eight players had hit a shot from behind the 3-point line. Another three by Connaughton about four minutes later was the 14th three of the night between the two teams.

The Irish would slowly and methodically pull away to build a lead that reached 21 on a steal and breakaway dunk by Grant with 38 seconds left in the half. They took a 19-point lead into the locker room.

Notre Dame shot 65-percent (17-of-26) from the floor, including 10-for-16 (62-percent) from three-point range, while Chicago State shot 11-for-29 (37-percent) and 5-for-11 (45-percent), respectively. Of the 83 combined points scored in the first half, 45 came on 3-pointers.

Grant led the Irish with 16 first half points. He was 6-for-6 from the floor, including 2-for-2 from long range. He was also 2-for-3 from the free throw line. Aaron Williams was Chicago State’s top first half scorer with nine points. He was 3-for-5 from the field with one trey.

“I think he’s just taking the pressure off him to remind him that he’s got other really good players to play with,” Brey said of Grant. “He doesn’t have to force anything. I thought he was really ready to go early. He hasn’t had great first halves. We need him to put two halves together, so hopefully we can build on that.”

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One of the biggest cheers of the night came at halftime when a live shot of the #1 sign atop Grace Hall followed by the current BCS football standings was flashed on the overhead scoreboard.

Grant's first missed shot of the game came on his first shot attempt of the second half with 16:32 remaining. He quickly made up for it though by driving for a layup on an assist from Atkins just 20 seconds later.

Notre Dame led by 22 early in the second half, but the Cougars cut the lead down to 13 with just over 14 minutes to play before an 18-0 run over the next 5-plus minutes delivered the knockout blow. Sherman scored six points during the stretch to see the Irish lead swell to 31.

Six different Notre Dame players scored during the run, which finally ended on a bucket by Jeremy Robinson. Sherman finished with 12 points for the Irish, Scott Martin scored 11 and Connaughton scored 10.

The Irish shot 36-of-59 (61-percent) from the floor for the game and 12-of-22 (54-percent) from 3-point range. Chicago State hit just 22-of-61 (36-percent) overall and 8-for-23 (34-percent) from behind the 3-point arc.

The Irish host Kentucky No. 8 Kentucky Thursday night at 7 p.m. ET. The game will be televised on ESPN2.