

Irish Take Down Kentucky

Written by Sean Mele

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NOTRE DAME, Ind. – Notre Dame’s battle with #8 Kentucky was greeted with great anticipation Thursday night in the Joyce Center. The fever pitch never stopped all game as the Irish outplayed the Wildcats in every facet of the game away and pulled off the 62-50 upset on “Black Out” night.

“This wasn’t about two teams battling and Notre Dame wins,” said Kentucky head coach John Calipari after the game. “This was about Notre Dame throwing around Kentucky and winning by as many as they need to win by.”

Notre Dame guard Eric Atkins came out firing and accounted for the first six Irish points, but a strong start by Kentucky still found the Irish trailing 9-6 at the first media timeout. The rest of the first half and game, however, was all Notre Dame as Mike Brey’s squad, inspired by an excited home crowd, gave the Wildcats all they could handle.

“The crowd can make you play fast or take quick shots if you’re young and I think it did that to Kentucky,” Brey said of the home court advantage. “Our crowd was definitely our sixth man tonight. That building was electric and having our football guys there was awesome. When our atmosphere is like that, I don’t care if you’re young or old - it’s going to be tough to win in there.”

The Irish would cut to the Wildcat lead to 14-12 on a Jack Cooley layup with 12:40 remaining. After a pair of Kentucky misses Atkins, who had 13 points in the first half, connected on his first

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three-pointer of the night to give the Irish their first lead at 15-14 with 10:33 left in the first half. Wildcat guard Jon Hood answered quickly with a 15-footer that gave Kentucky the lead right back.

At the eight minute mark Notre Dame reserve forward Cameron Biedscheid hit a layup to give the Irish their largest lead of the night at 19-16, a lead they never gave back.

Coming out of another timeout Cooley, who had seven rebounds in the first half, dunked the ball in traffic to give the Irish a 21-16 lead with 6:44 left. Biedscheid started heating up himself as he nailed a three-pointer at the 5:42 mark to give the Irish a 24-18 lead. Irish guard Jerian Grant joined the act as he was fouled while shooting, made the basket and free throw to stretch the Irish lead to nine with 4:35 left in the half.

Kentucky tried their best to stop the bleeding with a Kyle Wiltjer layup, but the Irish proved to be too much as a pair of baskets pushed the Irish lead to 34-23 with 1:46 remaining in the half. Cooley delivered again inside the paint with a close range jumper off the glass that extended the lead to 13 with 16 seconds left to play. The Wildcats cut the lead back down to 11 as a Jarrod Polson drive and flip went in at the buzzer.

Halftime found the Irish shooting a scorching 55 percent from the field as the Wildcats were an abysmal 37 percent from the floor. The Irish were also 3-for-7 from the three-point arc while Kentucky remained cold, only making one of their eight attempts. Notre Dame also held an 18-11 edge in rebounding, including four offensive boards. Atkins shot an unbelievable 85 percent from the field in the first half to pace the Irish.

The second half began with more of the same as senior guard Scott Martin hit a three-pointer at the 18:26 mark to yet again extend the Irish lead to 39-26. Kentucky super-freshman Alex Poythress gave his team a bit of momentum with a three-point play to cut the Notre Dame lead to 40-29. Martin, who had eight second half points, continued the hot hand with his 100th three-pointer of his career and a breakaway layup to give the Irish a 45-31 lead with 15:10 left in the second half.

Kentucky surprised no one by continuing to claw their way back into the game as Noel Nerlens and Ryan Harrow made back to back field goals to cut the Notre Dame lead to ten at the 13:45

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The Irish would have an answer of their own though as they put the game out of reach for good with a 10-0 run that included three-pointers by Biedscheid and Grant to give them a 20 point lead with 10:20 remaining in the game. Kentucky's Julius Mays ended the Notre Dame onslaught with a three-pointer of his own that came with 9:37 left.

Mays continued the hot streak after a TV timeout and drained his second and third three-pointer in a row to cut the Irish lead to 59-46 with 6:31 remaining in the game. Neither team mustered much offense for the next three minutes until Kentucky's Willie Cauley-Stein dunked the ball at the 3:28 mark to make it 59-48 Irish.

The drought continued on for the Irish, but finally ended with 2:57 remaining in the game as Grant made the front end of two free throw attempts to extend the lead 60-48 Irish. Cooley put a stop to the Irish field goal struggles after he grabbed his sixth offensive rebound of the night and went up strong to get his team back up by 12 with 1:54 remaining in the game. Rebounding was a key for Notre Dame all night and Brey points to that as the key to the game.

"I challenged us here two days ago after the St. Joe's thing," Brey said of the improved rebounding. "All of them shook their head yes and to keep that group one and done for the night was very much a key. Our perimeter helped us a little bit but Jack (Cooley), Sherm (Garrick Sherman), and Scott (Martin) really were good in there rebounding the ball for us."

Kentucky never got back into the game nor did they muster another field goal in the final two minutes as Atkins, who led all scorers with 16, drained the final Notre Dame shot of the night to give the Irish the 64-50 victory.