

## Irish Beat IPFW

Written by Sean Stires

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NOTRE DAME, Ind. – After a physical game on Saturday against intrastate rival Purdue in Indianapolis, Notre Dame made a quick turnaround with a home game against IPFW on Monday. The result was a hard fought 74-62 victory over the Mastodons from Ft. Wayne at Purcell Pavilion at the Joyce Center.

IPFW (5-7) would not go away on a night that lacked energy in the arena and flow on the court. In many ways, the Mastodons would not go away because the Irish (10-1) would not let them, while in others they would not go away due to sheer will.

“That team really defends,” Irish head coach Mike Brey said of IPFW. “They’re athletic and bothered us, especially in the first half (when) we turned it over nine times, which was disappointing.”

The Irish had as many turnovers (7) in the game’s first 10 minutes than made field goals, although they were still shooting a crisp 7-of-10. Atkins had two of those turnovers and found himself sitting. Atkins had a stretch of four straight games with just one turnover before committing two on Saturday against Purdue.

“I was just disappointed with the concentration of our guards,” Brey said of Atkins and Jerian Grant. “They have been so good and they have been so focused with taking care of the ball and shot selection. We were out of sorts, because they both weren’t in a good rhythm.”

The Irish finished the first half with nine turnovers. Cameron Biedscheid committed the ninth with 45 second left before the break. Brey quickly went yanked the freshman and sent veteran Tom Knight and junior Pat Crowley to the floor.

Notre Dame stretched the lead to 11, their biggest of the game to that point, when Pat Connaughton made a pair of free throws at the 3:57 mark of the first half. The lead soon swelled to 14 on a three pointer by Scott Martin less than two minutes later.

Connaughton led the Irish with 18 points on 7-of-9 shooting from the field. The sophomore has added a new dimension to his game this year by driving to the basket rather than being more the spot-up shooter he was as a freshman.

“It came down to what happened in practice, I think in practice I’ve been doing it more consistently,” Connaughton said after the game of his ability to penetrate. “The guys have been on me to do it a little bit more consistently. I think last year I was a little bit more of a shooter; one dimensional. I think that’s part of the expansion that I needed to make.”

Brey says Connaughton’s repertoire has grown in the last week, let alone the last season.

“I love how he curls and cuts,” Brey said of the sophomore’s game. “He’s so deceptive when he extends the finish. He’s so athletic. He’s finishing up there like big guys and over the top of guys. We want him to do that. If he gets fouled he’s gonna make free throws. I think that’s something in the last week that’s evolved with us offensively.”

By leading the Irish in scoring Monday night Connaughton became the fifth player in as many games to lead the team. Jack Cooley finished his night with 14 points and eight rebounds. Scott Martin was in double figures as well with 13 points.

Connaughton was also very involved at the defensive end of the court guarding IPFW leading scorer Frank Gaines (20.0 ppg). Connaughton held Gaines to just seven points on 2-of-14

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shooting, including 1-for-5 from three-point land. Gaines was the nation's ninth-leading scorer last season.

"That's kind of been my base throughout the whole season has been covering those guys who are averaging a lot of points," Connaughton said of his defense. "It's kind of a pride thing. I don't want to be scored on that much. That's just pure pride and hard work."

Notre Dame started the second half with more energy and stretched the lead to 16 points two different times on a pair of Cooley dunks. They even took better care of the ball to start the half. It took six minutes before Garrick Sherman committed ND's first turnover of the half and he lead swelled to 19 after a bucket by Sherman 30 seconds later.

The Fighting Irish ended the night with 13 turnovers, but just four in the second half. They also had 20 assists on 29 made field goals, while shooting nearly 52% from the floor. IPFW shot just 23-of-65 (35%).

Both teams will host Kennesaw State this week. The Irish host the Owls on Wednesday, with the Mastodons hosting on Friday. Kennesaw State is coached by former Notre Dame assistant Lewis Preston. It will mark the first time Brey has coached against one of his former assistants.

"I just thought relationship wise he was so good with players," Brey said of Preston. "He knew where to draw the line. He wasn't their buddy, but he knew how to communicate with them and they respected him. I think with his stops in his coaching career he learned a lot."

Preston coached for Brey from 2000-2006 before becoming an assistant at Florida for Billy Donovan. He also spent three seasons as an assistant at Penn State.