

Brey Shakes Up Lineup in Win

Written by Sean Stires

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NOTRE DAME, Ind. – A night that saw Notre Dame welcome a familiar face back to Purcell Pavilion at the Joyce Center saw Mike Brey make a rare starting lineup change on Wednesday night in a 85-57 win over Kennesaw State. Former Irish assistant Lewis Preston received a special commemorative ball from Brey prior to tipoff, while Brey sat starting lineup fixture Jerian Grant for the first time in more than a year.

“I have a lot of respect for this institution and I have a lot of respect for this basketball program,” said Lewis, who was a Brey assistant at Notre Dame from 2000-2006, after the game. “Not for what they’ve accomplished since I’ve been gone, but for what we were able to start to create here.”

“I want to develop and build a program that is very similar to this program. I think you have the complete package here academically, athletically and as well as in the community.”

Lewis is in his second year as head coach at Kennesaw State (1-9). He was an assistant at both Florida and Penn State before receiving his first head coaching job. Irish head coach Mike Brey paid a visit to the visiting locker room to speak to Preston’s team after the win.

“I think the word of Lew,” Brey began. “The one thing I told them was I’ve watched them a bunch. Not because we played them, but because it’s Lew’s program and he’s asked advice. I just wanted to tell them they’re getting better. They did what they had to do to stay in the game

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tonight. They were very disciplined.”

“They’re getting better, but they don’t have any wins to show for it. That is very discouraging. Sometimes when you hear it from the same head coach it’s tough. I just wanted to let them know you’re better and keep doing your thing.”

Grant had made 34 consecutive starts prior to sitting the first 7:40 of tonight’s game. He ended the game with 14 points, which tied Cooley’s team-high. The combination of Grant, Jack Cooley, Eric Atkins, Scott Martin, and Pat Connaughton had started 25 of the last 26 games. The last time Grant failed to start was in a 65-47 win over Dartmouth on Dec. 10 last year.

“Just starting a different way,” Brey responded when asked the thinking behind bringing Grant off the bench. “Just playing a little different, coach got a little crazy.”

Garrick Sherman made his second start of the season with Grant on the bench. Sherman’s other start came Thanksgiving weekend when Scott Martin sat with a sore knee against St. Francis.

“It was a little different,” Cooley said afterward of having fellow post player Sherman alongside him to start the game. “Because we usually run different plays at the start of the game compared to when Garrick and I are in there together. It was kind of odd to start that off that way, which might have had a lot to do with why we started off a little slow, but we got it together.”

Cooley finished his night with 14 points and 13 rebounds for his eighth double-double of the season after a tepid first half that saw him score six points and pull down five boards. The senior came into the week ranked second nationally with seven double doubles. He had gone two games without posting double digits in both points and rebounds.

The Irish scored 12 straight points on consecutive three pointers to take an early 16-9 lead. Connaughton hit a pair of threes, while Martin and Atkins each connected from long distance in the barrage as well.

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Atkins dished out a career-high 13 assists and scored nine points after struggling to get in a rhythm two nights ago in a 74-62 win over IPFW.

“I think Monday we were a little sluggish,” Atkins said after the game. “I think we just bounced back tonight, especially on the ball hitting more shots (and) me definitely getting everybody more involved. I think that really got us started, especially in the second half.”

Aaron Anderson carried Kennesaw State early in the game. The 6-foot-7 forward scored eight of the Owls’ first 14 points, including a three-point play on a layup and a foul by Martin. Anderson, who led his team with 16 points on the night, kept KSU close until the midway point of the first half, but the Irish used a 12-0 run to build a 30-16 lead. The run ended on a three pointer by Delbert Love.

Kennesaw State pulled within six points on a three by Markeith Cummings just before the halftime buzzer to make it 34-28 Irish at the intermission, but Notre Dame used an 8-0 run to start the second half to go up 42-28.

Martin reached the 1,000 point scoring mark for his career when he hit a 3-pointer with just under seven minutes remaining. It put the Irish up 62-44.

A scary moment came when Grant was fouled by Jordan Montgomery while attempting a dunk on a breakaway steal. Both players fell hard to the floor as Montgomery was called for a flagrant foul. Grant had to leave the game and Cameron Biedscheid hit Grant’s two free throws to put the Irish up 69-49.

Brey said after the game that Grant will be very questionable for Friday’s home game against Niagara with what he said is a “bruised back”.

“We don’t have any fractures, thank God,” Brey said of Grant’s condition after the fall. “That was a heck of a spill. He does not have any concussion symptoms. He bit his tongue a little bit; a

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few cuts, but a really bruised back. I just think he is gonna be too sore to do anything until we get back from Christmas.”

Biedscheid’s free throws were part of an 11-0 run that ended on a dunk by Connaughton to put ND up 76-49. Connaughton finished with 12 points and has now scored in double figures in three straight games. Biedscheid scored 12 points as well after totaling 11 points in his last two games.

The Irish shot 61% (32-of-52) from the field and 8-for-18 (44%) from three point range in their ninth straight win. Kennesaw State shot 40% (20-of-50) from the floor, including 27% (5-of-18) from behind the three point arc.

Connaughton’s former Notre Dame baseball teammate Will Hudgins was one of two former Irish baseball players in attendance for the game. Hudgins was joined in the front row directly across from the Irish bench by Cole Johnson. Hudgins is currently pitching in the Washington Nationals minor league system, while Johnson pitches in the Minnesota Twins organization.