

Irish On To BET Semis

Written by Sean Stires
Thursday, 14 March 2013 23:03



Pat Connaughton is on fire. A night after hitting 6-of-8 three-pointers en-route to a season-high 21 points in Wednesday's win over Rutgers, Connaughton canned 6-of-10 treys to score a game-high 21 points in Thursday's Big East Tournament quarterfinal 73-65 win over Marquette. Connaughton missed his first two long range shots and then made 6-of-8 the rest of the way.

Marquette made three of its first four shots to jump out to a 7-0 lead two minutes into the game. Jerian Grant hit a layup coming out of an Irish timeout to get his team on the scoreboard.

The Irish continued to struggle to find their shots in the early going, shooting just 2-of-16 (12%) from the field overall and 0-for-6 from three-point range to fall behind 17-4. They missed 11 consecutive shots after Tom Knight's layup at the 16:25 mark.

Grant finally ended a six-minute drought with a layup after the second media timeout. Pat Connaughton, who was coming off a season-high 21 points in Wednesday's win over Rutgers, then connected on a three-pointer to make it an eight-point game.

For a second straight night Grant did not shoot well, but still managed to finish in double figures. Grant was 3-for-10 for 11 points Wednesday against the Scarlet Knights. He was 4-for-15 with 17 points against the Golden Eagles.

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Meanwhile, Marquette could barely miss. The Golden Eagles hit eight of their first 13 shots - a 61 percent clip. Junior Cadougan was 3-for-3 from the floor in the stretch.

Another trey from Connaughton followed by two free throws on Notre Dame's next possession had Notre Dame on a 19-6 run that saw them tie the game at 23-23 with 3:25 to play before the half. They then took their first lead of the game after a Garrick Sherman layup 45 seconds later.

Sherman would finish with 16 points. It was his ninth double-digit scoring night of the season and his best point production since his 17 points in the five overtime win over Louisville last month. He was 6-for-12 from the field.

After the 2-for-16 start from the floor, the Fighting Irish connected on a blistering 9-for-16 (56%) clip to close the half on a 25-8 run for a 29-25 halftime lead. They finished the night by shooting 24-of-60 (40%).

The teams went back and forth throughout the second half. The Irish used a 10-2 run to take a 54-50 advantage with just over five minutes to play. They pushed the run to 18-4 and the lead to eight points before a Marquette three-pointer cut the Irish advantage to 62-57 with less than three minutes remaining.

Connaughton struck again though with his sixth three to push the lead back to eight points.

Jack Cooley had a second straight off night. The Irish big man fouled out with 1:26 to play with six points and six rebounds. It marked the third time in the last four games that Cooley failed to reach double digits. He was scoreless 12 days ago in a loss to Marquette and was held to nine points against Rutgers.

Notre Dame hit 17-of-19 (89%) free throws in the eight-point victory, which makes Cooley's senior class the winningest in the history of Notre Dame basketball. The current senior class has a record of 97-39 - one win better than the 2007-2011 class.

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The Irish are in the Big East Tournament semifinals for the fourth straight season. They are the only Big East team to advance as far in each of the last four years.

Notre Dame faces Louisville Friday night at about 9:30 p.m. ET. The game follows the first semifinal game between regular season champion Georgetown and Syracuse at 7 p.m.