



Posted on Mon, Nov. 22, 2010

Duke beats Marquette, picks up where it left off

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The Kansas City Star

Four games isn't enough time for any team to form an identity, much less one reloading from a national championship year.

But Marquette coach Buzz Williams studied top-ranked Duke, the Blue Devils' first three games of this year and their tournament run a year ago, and after falling to them 82-77 in the CBE Classic semifinal at the Sprint Center, he may have as good a handle on this as anybody.

"They're really good, but they're completely different than last year," Williams said.

But as Williams broke down the roster and what he dissected on tape, he reached a conclusion about Duke that would apply to this season or last.

"I don't know if you can pick a poison because everybody is poisonous," he said.

The Blue Devils were especially that over a 2-minute stretch in the second half when they turned a 57-57 game into a nine-point lead.

Nolan Smith started the run with a three-pointer. Andre Dawkins stole the inbounds pass for a quick basket. Kyle Singler drew a charge, and in an instant some terrific work by Marquette to overcome a double-digit deficit early in the second half had been lost.

"I thought our kids responded beautifully to that kind of pressure," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said.

As good as Duke's defense was during the run, the focal point was the play of Duke forward Mason Plumlee.

Plumlee, a 6-foot-10 sophomore, entered the game with 24 points on the season. He scored 25 on Monday while collecting 12 rebounds and five blocked shots.

"His performance tonight was huge," Krzyzewski said.

Plumlee had 18 in the second half and four during the Blue Devils' pivotal 9-0 run.

"I thought we played well in spurts," Plumlee said.

Williams thought otherwise, at least when it came to Plumlee.

"How many offensive rebounds did he have? Six?" Williams said. "I bet four of them were putbacks. We can't play like that."

Plumlee is playing more on the low post than he did a year ago.

"We think it's a better spot for him, to get him more touches low than high," Krzyzewski said. "When he gets it high, it's almost like we want him to be a perimeter guy, and he loses out on some of his toughness inside."

Duke's play near the basket was important Monday. Entering the game, the Blue Devils had been a 45-percent three-point shooting team. Marquette's tough perimeter defense forced Duke into six of 18 (33 percent) from behind the arc.

But the Golden Eagles didn't have an answer for Plumlee.

Still, Marquette applied plenty of stress. Jimmy Butler finished with 22 points, and the defense helped force Duke into 19 turnovers, 11 in the first half.

Just when it appeared the Blue Devils had salted things away on Plumlee's final basket with 1:11 remaining, Duke figured to run it out.

The Golden Eagles went into a foul strategy, and Duke missed three straight front ends of one-and-ones.

Correctable errors, Krzyewski said, and one of the few flaws Williams saw from a team he thinks is as good as the one that won it all.

"The complexion of how they play is somewhat different," Williams said. "But there is carry over from last year."

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