



Powered by  Clickability

Posted: Wednesday November 24, 2010 2:58AM ; Updated: Wednesday November 24, 2010 5:22PM



Seth Davis>INSIDE COLLEGE BASKETBALL

More Columns [Email Seth Davis](#) [Follow Seth Davis on !\[\]\(17413706fd4997a1a4bdf85c6864eee1_img.jpg\)](#)

Duke freshman Irving rises to occasion as MVP of CBE Classic

Story Highlights

No. 1 Duke beat K-State 82-68 to win the CBE Classic, led by MVP Kyrie Irving. Irving, a freshman, was the talk of the CBE Classic, leaving K-State in his dust. Irving scored 17 points with six assists and harassed K-State star Jacob Pullen

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- It was coming up on 12:30 a.m. on Wednesday morning when Kansas State forwards Jamar Samuels and Curtis Kelly stood in a hallway inside the Sprint Center, muttering to each other as they waited to enter the interview room. At that moment, Samuels and Kelly looked like a couple of Wile E. Coyotes, wondering where that pesky little Roadrunner had gone after leaving them splattered in the dust.

"Most freshmen can't handle our stuff," Kelly said softly. "He handled our stuff."

Samuels nodded in agreement. "Dribbled. Penetrated. Finished, too."

"He handled our *stuff*, man," Kelly repeated.

They were talking about Duke freshman point guard Kyrie Irving -- and they weren't the only ones. In this young season's biggest game, the youngest player was the biggest star. Irving, a 6-foot-2 point guard from West Orange, N.J., walked off with the most valuable player award while leading top-ranked Duke to an **82-68 pasting** of No. 4 Kansas State in the championship game of the CBE Classic. Blue Devils coach Mike Krzyzewski had asked a lot from his freshman. Start at point guard for the reigning NCAA champs. Run the offense. On the road. Against a great team. Oh, and while you're at it, would you mind guarding their senior All-American?

Irving did all that with aplomb, finishing with 17 points, six assists, five rebounds and three steals while sinking all seven of his free throw attempts. Irving harassed Kansas State guard Jacob Pullen into one of the worst nights of his career. Pullen made one field goal on 12 attempts, and he committed four turnovers to just one assist. Duke's defense on Pullen was a team effort, but Irving had the primary assignment, and he relished the opportunity.

"I really enjoyed guarding him today," Irving said. "It was a great challenge for me. I needed it."

Though he played with remarkable poise, Irving admitted afterward to being nervous at the start of the game. During one early possession, Irving drove hard into the lane and stopped too quickly at the foul line, where he slipped on a Reese's decal and committed an unforced turnover. In the ensuing huddle, Irving's senior teammates, Kyle Singler and Nolan Smith, tried to quell his nerves.

"I haven't really been in an atmosphere where the whole entire crowd was rooting against me," Irving said. "Kyle and Nolan could see I was nervous. They came to me and just said, 'Calm down. We're here for you.'"

Given how gifted Irving is, it's almost unfair to surround him with so much veteran talent. Krzyzewski's motion offense is tailor-made for Irving's skill set. He has an explosive first step and is highly adept with both hands, not only at dribbling but also finishing at the rim. If he gets by his defender, Irving has a bevy of options to choose from, including the team's two snipers off the bench, Andre Dawkins and Seth Curry, who were a combined 4-for-5 from three-point range against Kansas State. Sophomore center Mason Plumlee was also impressive in Kansas City. He followed up his 25-point, 12-rebound performance in Monday's semifinal win over Marquette by going for 10 points and five rebounds against the Wildcats.

It all starts with Irving, but it can end anywhere.

"They run an NBA-spaced offense. Coach K has this down to a science," Pullen said. "With that ball screen action, there's nowhere you can help from. You have to pick your poison. Either you live with [Irving] dribble-driving, or you help and they lob up to the bigs, or you help from the corner and they shoot the ball. They've got a lot of upperclassmen, and Kyrie is a poised young freshman. Right now they're No. 1 in the country for a reason."

As much hype as Irving got coming out of high school, it turns out he is actually better than advertised. Through his first five games as a collegian, he has 33 assists and only 11 turnovers. He has made 48 percent on field goals, 42 percent on three-pointers, and 91 percent on free throws. The most pleasant surprise is his prowess as a defender, which was on full display Tuesday night. Even Krzyzewski said during a practice last month that he didn't realize how committed Irving was to that part of the game.

"He can say he's surprised, but when you come in here as a freshman point guard, you're expected to play defense," Irving said. "That's what Duke is built on. That's our foundation. I have confidence in myself, and I believe I can guard great players."

Irving is a great player himself, and he's only 18 years old.

"This was really fun," he said Tuesday night. "This is what I came to Duke for, playing in a big game on a big-time stage."

Kansas State and its fans threw everything they had at Irving, but in the end they could only stand there shaking their hands. Give the young fella his due. He handled it, man.

Find this article at:

http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2010/writers/seth_davis/11/24/duke.kansas.state.cbe.classic

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright © 2007 CNN/Sports Illustrated.