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Missouri dominates Notre Dame in CBE Classic

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Notre Dame's top player, Tim Abromaitis, returned to action in time for the most difficult assignment of the season.

But the Irish needed much more than Abromaitis.

No. 21 Missouri clubbed Notre Dame 87-58 in the semifinal round of the CBE Classic at Sprint Center on Monday. The Tigers will meet California at 9 tonight in the championship game.

"Flat out men against boys," Notre Dame coach Mike Brey said. "That was the varsity against the JV."

Perhaps the most impressive part for the Tigers was how they constructed this blowout against the team picked to finish ninth in the Big East's preseason coaches' poll.

The Tigers outrebounded the taller Irish 38-24. And unlike previous teams, Mizzou didn't live outside the three-point arc. They attempted only 11 and made five.

"We're not just a jump-shooting team," Tigers guard Marcus Denmon said. "I'm excited about what we have."

This triumph was crafted with superior quickness that drove Notre Dame to distraction on both ends of the floor.

Offensively, Missouri guards constantly got to the basket. Denmon, playing in his hometown, and Phil Pressey were too quick for Irish defenders.

When the Missouri guards weren't scoring they were kicking it to shooters. That's how Missouri sizzled for 63 percent shooting in the first half, a number that increased early in the second half as the Tigers blew the lid off the game.

Denmon finished with 26 points, Pressey 17, and when Ricardo Ratliffe added his 12 and Kim English 10, Mizzou, 4-0, made it four straight games with at least four double-digit scorers.

But the big advantage came on the defensive end.

Missouri's perimeter pressure made it difficult for Notre Dame to get into its sets. The Irish shot it well enough, 50 percent for the first half, but the Tigers came up big on all the hustle statistics like 10 steals and a 12-0 edge in fast-break points.

A couple of plays defined the game in the first half.

Phil Pressey picked Alex Dragicevich cleanly at midcourt and had a clear path to the basket. But Pressey hesitated, allowing Dragicevich to beat him to the basket. But Pressey went up strong, got the call and completed a three-point play.

Moments earlier, MU center Steve Moore, another hometown product, redirected a shot. Denmon picked up the loose ball and went hard to the basket for another three-point play.

"This was a whole other level of trying to keep people in front of you," Brey said.

The game was the best example during the young season of what Missouri coach Frank Haith preached throughout the preseason.

"We want to play inside out," Haith said. "There are going to be games when we don't make threes."

And the Tigers will have to rely on other parts of their game. All of them clicked on Monday.

Abromaitis tried to do it all for a young Notre Dame that has seen five different players make their first career starts this season. He was on the floor for the first time this season after missing the first four serving an NCAA suspension.

The Tigers often went with Matt Pressey, English or Michael Dixon on the smooth, tough-minded Abromaitis, a 6-foot-8 forward — all giving up at least a few inches to him. In the first half, Abromaitis put up 18 points. But he finished with 22 as the Tigers clamped down.

“We had 13 turnovers in the game, but it felt like 20,” Abromaitis said.

Brey was effusive in his praise of the MU squad that is transitioning to a new coach with a load of experienced players.

“I’m glad they’re not in our league,” Brey said. “I don’t want to deal with them again.”

CBE CLASSIC At the Sprint Center

•**Third place:** Notre Dame vs. Georgia, 6:45 tonight, ESPNU

•**Championship:** Missouri vs. California,
9 tonight, ESPN2

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