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Brey on Mizzou-ND: 'Men against boys'

By Jason King

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- After nearly two decades in the Big 12, the [Missouri Tigers](#) decided last month to join a new conference in 2012-13.

Thankfully, it's not the Big East.

So says Notre Dame coach Mike Brey, who watched helplessly from the sideline Monday as the 21st-ranked Tigers embarrassed his Fighting Irish [87-58](#) in the semifinals of the CBE Classic at the Sprint Center.

"I'm glad they're not in our league," Brey said. "That was flat out men against boys, the varsity against the JV."

[Marcus Denmon](#) scored 26 points and [Phil Pressey](#) added 17 to lead Missouri, which advanced to play No. 18 Cal in Tuesday's championship. Impressive as the Golden Bears were in Monday's blowout of Georgia in the nightcap, they'll be hard-pressed to beat the Tigers if Mizzou plays half as good as it did against Notre Dame.

"Notre Dame is a good team," Missouri coach Frank Haith said. "They're going to win a lot of games in the Big East. To have a performance like that obviously has to give these guys some confidence."

This wasn't the same Notre Dame squad that finished 27-7 and second in the Big East last season. Ben Hansbrough is gone. So are Tyrone Nash and Carleton Scott. Still, with players such as [Tim Abromaitis](#) and [Scott Martin](#) returning, the thought was that the Irish would at least be able to keep Monday's game close.

Instead, it was lopsided from the start. Missouri improved to 4-0. Notre Dame, which played its fifth game in 10 days, fell to 4-1. Abromaitis was the only bright spot with 22 points, including 18 in the opening half.

"This was a rude awakening of high-level college basketball for our young guys," Brey said.

Indeed, Missouri outrebounded Notre Dame by 14 and scored 44 points in the paint -- an impressive feat for a squad that uses just two pure post players in [Ricardo Ratliffe](#) and [Steve Moore](#). Talented as they are offensively, the most impressive aspect of the Tigers on Monday was their defense, which held the Fighting Irish to 25 percent shooting in the second half and just 37 percent for the game.

"That's where it starts," Denmon said. "Even on nights when we're not shooting well, we can always create points by playing defense."

Even though it entered the game with a 3-0 record, Missouri's victory was special because it was the Tigers' first under Haith against an opponent from a BCS conference. It's been a tough offseason in

Columbia, where some fans expressed disbelief with athletic director Mike Alden's decision to hire Haith following the departure of Mike Anderson to Arkansas. Haith led Miami to just one NCAA tournament appearance in seven years.

Things got worse last summer when Haith's name was linked to Miami booster Nevin Shapiro, who allegedly made numerous payments to Hurricanes athletes -- including one basketball player -- during Haith's tenure. Another distraction surfaced shortly after school began when standout forward [Laurence Bowers](#) tore his ACL and was lost for the season.

Asked if he was proud of his team for persevering through tough circumstances, Haith said. "There's no question. We're a team no one is really talking about. These guys work their tails off. When you take over a new team, it takes time. But these guys have been willing participants. They want to learn."

As a result, Missouri looks to be in midseason form while other schools across the country are trying to find themselves. In their last season in the Big 12 before joining the SEC, the Tigers appear more than capable of ending Kansas' run of seven straight conference titles. It'd certainly make for a great story.

Brey is just glad he won't be a part of it.

"I don't want to have to deal with them again," he said.
