



Notre Dame Fighting Irish

Notre Dame Basketball: 5 Things Learned from the Loss to Georgia

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The Progressive CBE Classic was a great experience for Notre Dame's young players. It was also a good gauge of just how Notre Dame will fare this season.

Unfortunately for the Irish, they lost their second game in as many nights, this one to Georgia 61-57. Coach Mike Brey searched for, but had little answers for the quickness and athleticism of both Missouri and Georgia during the CBE Classic.

Notre Dame got hammered on the boards 37-23 with Georgia pulling down 11 offensive boards and getting 12 second-chance points. The Bulldogs also outscored the Irish on fast break points 10-4.

All in all, this was a game between two middle-of-the-pack teams that Georgia ending up winning because Notre Dame had a cold shooting night (34.8 percent).

Let's look at five things learned from the Georgia game.

Notre Dame Played Much Better Help Defense



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I was interested to see how Notre Dame would respond to the whooping Missouri gave them. While Missouri scorched the Irish interior defense for 44 points, Georgia could muster only 20.

The Irish's help defense was much better as players were stepping in the lane and preventing Georgia drivers from getting to the rim.

It was a vast improvement over the Missouri game and was encouraging to see.

Notre Dame Must Shoot Well to Win



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Abromaitis had a rough night, shooting just 1-for-12 and scoring six points. But he was not the only one to struggle from the field.

As a team, Notre Dame shot just 16-for-46 and missed on many key possessions that would have tied or given them the lead in this game.

Ultimately, the Irish are not a team that can shoot poorly and still win. They don't have the athleticism or rebounding to counter poor shooting nights.

Quite simply, if the Irish struggle from the floor, they will not win.

Pat Connaughton Has Played His Way into the 6th Man Role



Connaughton, a true freshman, has established himself as the sixth man. With Alex Dragicevich ineffective and Joey Brooks still a bit under the weather, Connaughton was the first player off the bench.

In 18 minutes of action, Connaughton scored 11 points on 4-for-7 shooting from the floor. He also showed that he can move well without the ball and knows where the open spot is in the defense.

Connaughton was on the receiving end of some nice passing because he made cuts to the basket to take advantage of openings he recognized.

Connaughton is athletic and aggressive, two things the Irish desperately need.

The Light Came on for Jerian Grant



Watching Grant play early in the season, you knew it was only a matter of time before the game slowed down and it clicked for him.

About five minutes into the Georgia game, it happened. Grant became aggressive with drives to the hoop and for the first time looked completely comfortable on the floor.

In other words, Grant just played basketball and left the other stuff in the locker room. He showed his quickness, athleticism and shooting range.

His final stats read 20 points on 4-for-7 shooting from the field and 10-for-11 from the free-throw line. Grant consistently beat his man off the dribble and got to the rim, either finishing or getting fouled.

As a redshirt frosh, he'll have some off nights, but it appears the light is now on for Grant.

Notre Dame Is Still a Work in Progress



Jamie Squire/Getty Images

What I'm saying is with only Scott Martin and Tim Abromaitis returning from last years starting five, the Irish have not yet jelled.

You can still see the hesitancy in their cuts and passes to each other. Atkins is still trying to figure out where Abromaitis likes the ball. Cooley is still trying to figure out where he needs to set up on the low post in order for the guards to feed him. And so on.

Abromaitis missing the first four games didn't help the chemistry on this team, and because of that, they've really only had two exhibition games and two regular season games to play as a unit.

Right now, they're rough and a work in progress. The chemistry got better from the Missouri game to the Georgia game.

The next game up is Bryant on Sunday and the Irish will have a chance to work further on their chemistry. And with Gonzaga and Maryland up after Bryant, they'll need it.

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