

Laszewski leads young Notre Dame team past UIC

By Anthony Anderson

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (AP) — Notre Dame coach Mike Brey doesn't want to waste a lot of time finding out how good his newcomers might be. In his team's season opener Tuesday night, the early returns were encouraging.

Freshmen Nate Laszewski, Robby Carmody and Dane Goodwin were among five Fighting Irish players to score in double figures as youthful Notre Dame cruised by Illinois-Chicago 84-67.

"My attitude is we're going to play 10 guys in the first half, and then they'll tell us who's going to play in the second half," Brey said after improving to 19-0 in openers during his Irish tenure.

The 6-foot-10 Laszewski led the way with 12 points and a game-high nine rebounds in 19 minutes off the bench.

Carmody — who became the first freshman to start an opener for Notre Dame since Torin Francis in 2002 — added 11 points in 14 minutes. Goodwin finished with 10 points.

Junior John Mooney and sophomore D.J. Harvey also scored 10 for the Irish.

"I'm pleasantly surprised and pleased, because we were not very good in our scrimmage against Cincinnati and we were not very good in our exhibition," Brey said, referring to a closed-door workout against the Bearcats and a 76-54 win over Central State last week. "I was very concerned (facing) an older team in UIC and city guards. But our defense certainly was certainly a key to get us started and I loved how we drove the ball."

Notre Dame built a 46-23 advantage by halftime and was up by a high of 76-40 with 8:48 to go before the Flames narrowed the gap by scoring 16 of the game's final 18 points.

Marcus Ottey led UIC with 17 points. Tarkus Ferguson added 12.

"They came out and punched us early and we didn't handle that very well, and that kind of set the tone for the game," UIC coach Steve McClain said. "I thought watching them in their exhibition, (Notre Dame's) young players really took a big jump from the exhibition to tonight."

The Irish drained 36 of 38 free throws to overcome their 22-of-62 effort from the field.

Notre Dame rolled despite its two returning starters, T.J. Gibbs and Rex Pflueger, combining for just 14 points and 3-of-18 field-goal shooting.

BIG PICTURE

Notre Dame: The Irish were effective in beginning the task of cutting their teeth against a strained-carrot kind of schedule early. All of ND's first seven games are at home — the program's longest such start in 32 years — and none of those contests will be against any of the 53 teams that received a vote in the AP preseason poll.

UIC: Coming off a 20-16 record, this was one of just two opportunities for the Flames to burn bright this season against a team from a Power Five conference. The other comes Dec. 8 at Colorado.

FREE, AND EASY

The Irish have typically been among the nation's best free throw shooting teams under Brey, but even he was impressed by 36 of 38.

"I thought we'd be really good, (but) that's crazy off the charts," Brey said of the 95 percent shooting.

"I told my boss it's all because of the practice facility," the coach added with a smile of Rof's Athletics Hall, ND's newly opened facility for the men's and women's basketball teams. "We got three extra baskets and can shoot more free throws."

D.J. Harvey and Elijah Burns each went 6 of 6 at the line, while Carmody and Laszewski had the two missed, but still each finished 5 of 6.

Brey joked that the two players who missed are going to have their scholarships rescinded.

FRESH START

Brey said he was torn about his starting lineup, and about starting a freshman in an opener for the first time in 16 years, but went with Carmody over a couple other options because "he's a downhill, make-plays, unafraid kind of guy."

The 6-4 guard made a quick impact, scoring four points, making two steals, grabbing two rebounds and coaxing a UIC charging foul over the opening 11 minutes.

"Maybe the play that set the tone was the charge on the guard up top," Brey said. "He put his chest right in there, and he can defend."

UP NEXT

Notre Dame: welcomes a team from the Windy City for the second time in three days when Chicago State comes to town Thursday.

UIC: playing three straight road games to start the season for the first time in program history, the Flames visit defending Big South champion Radford on Friday in a first-ever meeting.