

2 West seed NOTRE DAME (21-9)

vs.

1 East seed CONNECTICUT (22-6)

March 8, 2002 — Semifinals

ConAgra Foods BIG EAST Men's Basketball Championship Madison Square Garden — New York, N.Y.

SCOUTING THE IRISH: After earning a first-round bye for the second consecutive year, the Notre Dame men's basketball team (21-9) is in the BIG EAST Championship semifinals for the first time since becoming a conference member in 1995-96. Last night's 83-63 victory was just the second win ever for the Irish in tournament play. Notre Dame advanced to the quarterfinals in 2000 following a 74-62 victory over Rutgers in the first round of the 2000 championship. The Irish are now 2-6 in BIG EAST tournament action.

Tonight's matchup with Connecticut (22-6) is the first meeting of the season and the 10th ever in the series. The two schools had never played each other prior to Notre Dame joining the BIG EAST. The Huskies have won four of the last six matchups between the two schools, including last year's 75-59 victory over the Irish at the Hartford Civic Center on February 26, 2001. Notre Dame swept the two regular-season meetings during the 1999-2000 campaign — 75-70 (in Hartford, Conn., on Jan. 5, 2000 and 68-66 on Feb. 12, 2000).

The Irish head into tonight's game having won nine of their last 12 games. Notre Dame's 21 wins are the most since the 1988-89 campaign when that Irish squad finished with a 21-9 overall record.

Notre Dame continued its stellar performance on the road with last night's 20-point victory as the Irish are now 12-5 overall (8-4 in contests on the opponent's home floor and 4-1 in neutral in games played away from the friendly confines of the Joyce Center).

The nine losses suffered by the Irish this season have been by a combined 37 points for an average margin of defeat of 4.11 points. Notre Dame's 83-73 setback against Georgetown was its largest loss of the season.

BREY HAS THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS AT NOTRE DAME: Mike Brey is the first Notre Dame coach to lead the Irish into the BIG EAST tournament semifinals. Since his arrival, the second-year Irish mentor has led Notre Dame to 21-11 record in regular-season games for a 65.5 winning percentage and 1-1 mark in tournament play for a 22-12 overall record (.647) against league foes.

IRISH THRIVING ON THE ROAD: Notre Dame played just 13 home this season, but the Irish have found life on the road to be rather friendly. The Irish are 8-4 in contests played on the opponent's home floor and are 4-1 in neutral site contests. A year ago, Notre Dame was 6-4 on the road in Mike Brey's first season and 2-2 in neutral site contests for an overall 8-6 mark. In two seasons under Brey, Notre Dame has a 14-8 (.636) road mark and 6-3 (.667) record in neutral site contests. Over the past two seasons, Notre Dame is 20-11 (.645) playing away from home.

SERIES RECORD VS. CONNECTICUT: Connecticut leads the series 6-3 and has won four of the last six meetings. All nine matchups between the two teams have been played since the 1995-96 campaign when the Irish became a BIG EAST member. Two of Notre Dame's three victories have been at the Joyce Center. This is the first matchup played between the two schools on a neutral site.

MERRY "CHRIS"-MAS: Chris Thomas' 228 assists and 68 steals are both Notre Dame single-season records. Thomas set the assist record against Providence in the final regular-season game of the season. He had five steals against St. John's last night to eclipse the previous mark of 66 established by Jimmy Dillon during the 1999-2000 campaign.

KEEPING THE STREAK ALIVE: Forward David Graves suffered a sprained left ankle in practice on Tuesday (March 5), but that did not keep him from starting last night's game against St. John's and playing 26 minutes. Graves has never missed a game during his four-year career and holds the Notre Dame record for career contests played (127).

HUMPHREY ROLLING ALONG: Ryan Humphrey's 21 points and 13 rebounds marked his 19th double double of the season and 39th of his career. He has a double double in each of his last eight games, which currently ranks as the longest streak nationally according to STATS Inc. He has registered a double double in 15 of the last 19 contests. Humphrey has scored in double figures in 27 of the 28 games he has played and scored 20-plus points in 11 games this season and has grabbed 10-plus boards in 20 contests.

HUMPHREY REACHES 1,000 CAREER REBOUNDS: Ryan Humphrey grabbed his 1,000th career rebound against St. John's last night giving him 1,001 in 120 career games for a career average of 8.33. In 57 career contests at Notre Dame, he has grabbed 558 boards for an average of 9.78 per contest. He has scored 1,557 career points for a 13.1 career average.

110 AND COUNTING: Heading into tonight's BIG EAST Championship semifinal game, Notre Dame has hit one three-pointer in 110 straight games, which dates back to the 1998-99 campaign. The last time the Irish did not make a three-pointer was in a 101-70 loss to Connecticut in the Hartford Civic Center (Jan. 12, 1999) as Notre Dame finished 0-7 in the contest from three-point range.

GOING THE DISTANCE: Chris Thomas played all 40 minutes against St. John's last night marking the 12th time this season he has gone the distance in 30 contests this season. During the BIG EAST regular season, he played the entire game in nine of Notre Dame's 16 league contests.

THOMAS IN CONTROL: Notre Dame's 1.45 assist-to-turnover ratio can be attributed to the play of freshman point guard Chris Thomas who has already dished off a Notre Dame single-season record 228 assists for a 7.60 average. He has committed just 89 turnovers for a 2.56 assist-to-turnover ratio and is averaging a turnover every 12.78 minutes played. In the last five games, he has dished off 48 assists and committed just 16 turnovers.

DOUBLE THE PLEASURE: **Chris Thomas** registered his sixth double double of the season against St. John's last night as he scored 15 points and dished off 11 assists. He has scored in double figures in 22 games this season and registered 10-plus assists in eight games.

ON THE OFFENSIVE: **Chris Thomas** has certainly had an impact on the Irish offense this season. The rookie point guard has figured in on 44.5 percent of Notre Dame's offensive firepower this season — of the 845 field goals scored, he has 148 field and dished off 228 assists.

THE DEFENSE NEVER RESTS: Notre Dame's field goal percentage defense has been impressive this season as the Irish have held 11 of their 30 opponents to under 37 percent shooting from the field. St. John's was just 25-76 (32.9 percent) last night. Notre Dame has held five opponents to under 32 percent and only two opponents — Alabama and Villanova — have shot better than 50 percent.

IRISH VERSUS RANKED OPPONENTS: Notre Dame is facing its eighth ranked opponent this season and own a 3-4 record. The Irish have beaten Pittsburgh twice (56-53 at Pittsburgh and 89-76 at Notre Dame) and Miami on the road (90-77).

WINNING BIG: Notre Dame's margin of victory through 30 games this season has been 11.2 points per game. Notre Dame's victories have included a 42-point victory over New Hampshire, a 40-point win over Hawaii Pacific and 37-point margin of victories against Monmouth and Army. The Irish have beaten seven teams by 27-plus points and 13 of its 21 victories have been by 10-plus points. Its closest margin of victory was a one-point win (70-69) over Miami-Ohio on the road on Dec. 8.

IRONMEN: **David Graves** has played in all 127 games of his Irish career, while **Harold Swanagan** has missed just three games (all this season against Colgate, Georgetown and Seton Hall). Prior to the Colgate game, Swanagan has played in 108 consecutive contests. Graves and Swanagan played in all 30 games during their freshmen and junior seasons and saw action in all 37 in their sophomore campaign. Graves has earned 104 starting appearances during his three seasons, while Swanagan has made 75 starts. Swanagan's 124 appearances in an Irish uniform ranks second all-time.

TRIFICETA: The perimeter shooting combination of **David Graves**, **Matt Carroll** and **Chris Thomas** have combined for 93.2 percent of Notre Dame's three-pointers this season. The Irish trio has made 204 of the team's 219 shots from beyond the arc and has taken 89.7 percent (522 of 572) of its three-point attempts. Graves leads the team with 71 three-pointers, followed by Thomas (68) and Carroll (65).

BLOCK PARTY: Notre Dame set the single-season team record for blocked shots last season with 178 in 30 games for an average of 5.93 per game. The previous mark of 145 was set by the 1991-92 Irish squad. **Ryan Humphrey** led the Irish with 79 blocks a year ago (the second-highest individual single-season total in school history) and ranked 18th nationally in that category with 2.7 blocks per game. Humphrey tied his season-high with six blocks last night against St. John's and now has 75, 12 away from LaPhonso Ellis' mark of 86.

THE HUMPHREY HYPE: **Ryan Humphrey's** streak of eight consecutive double doubles is the longest since LaPhonso Ellis' senior season, the 1991-92 campaign, when he put together a string of nine straight games with a double double. Humphrey's 19 double doubles are the third most by an Irish player in a single season since that same year when Ellis registered double figures in both scoring and rebounding in 23 games. Troy Murphy had 20 double doubles during the 1999-2000 campaign, his sophomore season. He had a string of five straight double double efforts on two occasions during that year.