

NOTRE DAME WOMEN'S BASKETBALL 2005-06 SUPPLEMENTAL NOTES

2005-06 Notre Dame Women's Basketball – Game 9

Duel in the Desert – Championship Game (Gray Division)

#13/14 Notre Dame Fighting Irish (7-1 / 0-0 BIG EAST) vs.

#22/21 Utah Utes (7-1 / 0-0 Mountain West)

DATE: December 18, 2005

TIME: 2:30 p.m. PT (5:30 p.m. ET in South Bend)

AT: Las Vegas, Nev. / Cox Pavilion (2,500)

SERIES: Notre Dame leads 1-0

ONLY MEETING: 3/24/01 (ND 69-54)

RADIO: ESPN Radio 1580 AM (Sean Stires, p-b-p)

LIVE STATS: www.und.com and www.unlvrebels.com

NOTRE DAME FACES #22/21 UTAH FOR DUEL IN THE DESERT CROWN

The No. 13/14 Notre Dame women's basketball team will face its third ranked opponent this season when the Irish take on No. 22/21 Utah in the Gray Division championship game of the Duel in the Desert on Sunday at 2:30 p.m. (PT) inside Cox Pavilion in Las Vegas. Notre Dame has won 11 of its last 12 regular-season tournament games and is playing in the title contest of an in-season tourney for the sixth consecutive time, having won on four of the previous five occasions (only loss: 67-63 in overtime at #20 Colorado in the finals of the 2003 WBCA Classic).

The Irish (7-1) earned their place in Sunday's Duel in the Desert championship game with a 77-54 victory over Arkansas State on Saturday afternoon. Notre Dame jumped out to a 21-5 lead a little more than six minutes into the game and never looked back, posting its largest win of the season. Sophomore center **Melissa D'Amico** scored a career-high 20 points on 10-of-12 shooting in only 18 minutes, while senior guard **Megan Duffy** added 13 points, six assists and five rebounds, and junior guard **Breona Gray** (a 2003 graduate of nearby Bishop Gorman High School) enjoyed a successful homecoming with 12 points.

NOTING THE ARKANSAS STATE WIN

- Notre Dame was playing its first-ever game in the state of Nevada.
- The 23-point margin of victory was the largest of the year for Notre Dame (previously 19 vs. Iona on Nov. 29).
- The Irish now have won 11 of their last 12 regular-season tournament games, dating back to the 1996-97 season.
- Notre Dame now is 3-0 all-time against current Sun Belt Conference schools (one win each vs. Arkansas State, Middle Tennessee and Florida International).
- The Irish have led or been tied at the half in seven of their eight games this year (all wins).
- It's also the seventh time in eight games this year the Irish have had at least three double-figure scorers (all wins).
- Notre Dame set season bests for points in a half (45; previous was 42 in the 1st half at Wisconsin on Dec. 4), a game (tied - 77; also at Wisconsin on Dec. 4), field goals made (32; previous was 29 vs. Iona on Nov. 29), field goals attempted (73; previous was 66 vs. Iona on Nov. 29), assists (19; previous was 15 on two occasions) and fewest turnovers (11; previous was 12 at Western Michigan on Nov. 20).

- The Irish held Arkansas State to an opponent season-low .255 field goal percentage, the best defensive performance for Notre Dame since Feb. 5, 2005, when the Irish held Pittsburgh to a .250 mark in a 75-47 victory in the Steel City.
- Sophomore center **Melissa D'Amico** tallied a career-high 20 points on 10-of-12 shooting in just 18 minutes, breaking her previous scoring best of 13 points vs. USC on Nov. 27, 2005; D'Amico has five double-digit scoring games in eight outings this year after having just one in her rookie season (26 games).
- Returning to her hometown of Las Vegas, junior guard **Breona Gray** posted her second double-digit game of the year with 12 points (season-high is 14 points at Indiana on Nov. 23).
- Freshman forward **Chandrica Smith** set new season bests with four points and four rebounds in 18 minutes; previous marks were three points and two boards in six minutes vs. Iona on Nov. 29.
- Senior co-captains **Megan Duffy** and **Courtney LaVere** inched closer to the 1,000-point mark for their careers with 13 and nine points, respectively; LaVere now has 956 points, while Duffy is hot on her heels with 954 markers.

NOTRE DAME/UTAH SERIES TIDBITS

- Notre Dame leads the all-time series with Utah, 1-0, with the only prior game (ND 69-54) coming on March 24, 2001 in the Midwest Regional semifinals of the NCAA Tournament at Denver's Pepsi Center. Neither team has a player on its current roster who appeared in that contest.
- The Irish are 5-2 (.714) all-time against current Mountain West Conference teams (3-1 vs. Colorado State, 1-0 vs. Utah and New Mexico, 0-1 vs. San Diego State). Notre Dame is 3-2 against MWC teams outside of South Bend (1-1 vs. CSU; 1-0 vs. Utah and UNM; 0-1 vs. SDSU).
- The Irish have faced only two teams from the state of Utah in their 29-year history — in addition to the aforementioned matchup with Utah in the 2001 NCAA Tournament, Notre Dame defeated BYU in their only encounter to date, 81-69 on Dec. 5, 1987 in Green Bay, Wis.
- Notre Dame and Utah were sent to the same NCAA sub-regional last year, as both teams ventured to the Save Mart Center in Fresno, Calif. Curiously, both teams were ousted in the second round on the Save Mart Center floor by Pac-10 Conference opponents (ND by Arizona State, Utah by Stanford).
- Sunday's game will feature a handful of candidates for several major national honors, as Notre Dame senior guard **Megan Duffy**, Utah senior forward **Kim Smith** and Utes senior guard **Shana Thorburn** all are on the radar for the State Farm/WBCA Wade Trophy, the Naismith Award and the Wooden Women's Award. Duffy and Thorburn also are in line for consideration for the Nancy Lieberman Award, given to the nation's top point guard.
- There will be a whole lot of coaching muscle on the sidelines in Sunday's Duel in the Desert Gray Division final. Notre Dame's **Muffet McGraw** and Utah's **Elaine Elliott** have been in the head coaching business a combined total of 47 seasons, amassing 976 wins between them.

TOURNAMENT TESTED

Notre Dame has had much success in regular season tournaments during the past 10 seasons. In fact, the Irish have won 11 of their last 12 in-season tournament games, highlighted by last year's four-game run to the Preseason WNIT crown. The only loss in this current stretch (1996-97 to present) was a 67-63 overtime decision at No. 20 Colorado on Nov. 15, 2003 in the finals of the WBCA Classic — a game that saw the Buffaloes drain a 30-foot three-pointer at the end of regulation to force the extra session.

BACK IN THE SADDLE

Notre Dame head coach **Muffet McGraw** was back on the sidelines for Saturday's win vs. Arkansas State following a three-game absence brought on by an acute illness. Although she was not there in person (associate head coach **Coquese Washington** coached the team in the interim), McGraw was credited with the two wins and one loss while she was out. In her 24-year career, McGraw now owns a 506-197 (.720) record, including a 418-156 (.728) mark in 19 seasons at Notre Dame. Sunday's game vs. Utah also will be McGraw's 575th contest with the Irish.

RUNNIN' WITH THE IRISH

In six of their seven wins this season, Notre Dame has used a large run to pull free of their opponent and take control of the game. Most recently, the Irish opened Saturday's victory over Arkansas State with a 21-5 charge and never looked back. In the other five wins, Notre Dame needed its run in the second half to move ahead for good, including three outings (Michigan, Indiana and USC) where that spurt came in the final 11 minutes after the Irish were trailing.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

The Irish have been particularly solid on Sundays this season, going 3-0 in such contests this season with wins over Western Michigan (71-68), No. 24/21 USC (73-62) and Wisconsin (77-72).

BALANCING ACT

In all seven of its victories this season, Notre Dame has had at least three players score in double figures, with four cracking the mark against USC, Iona and Wisconsin. What's more, the Irish have had seven different players score in double digits at some point this season, led by senior guard **Megan Duffy** (seven times) and sophomore center **Melissa D'Amico** (five times). D'Amico career-high 20 points in Saturday's win over Arkansas State also represented the second time in eight games this year that Duffy did not lead Notre Dame in scoring (sophomore guard **Charel Allen** came off the bench to pour in a game-best 16 points in the season opener vs. Michigan on Nov. 18).

TURNING UP THE DEFENSE

The Irish have won all three games this season in which they have held their opponent to less than 60 points (Michigan, Iona and Arkansas State). During the past 11 seasons, Notre Dame is 153-9 (.944) when keeping the opposition below the 60-point threshold.

ALL ABOUT THE ADJUSTMENTS

Notre Dame has led at halftime in six of eight games this year, winning all six times. During the past six seasons, the Irish now are 103-8 (.928) when it takes a lead to the locker room, including wins in 32 of their last 34 such contests.

PROTECTING THE PILL

The Irish have had 15 or fewer turnovers in five games this season, going 4-1 in those contests, including a season-low 11 giveaways in Saturday's win over Arkansas State. Notre Dame had 15 giveaways in its lone loss this year — 65-54 at No. 24/23 Purdue on Dec. 7.