

Notre Dame beats Baylor 88-69 to get to Final Four

Written by Administrator
Tuesday, 01 April 2014 11:47

SOUTH BEND, Ind. (AP) — Muffet McGraw and Notre Dame have become fixtures in the Final Four.

But with Skylar Diggins gone to the WNBA, it was hard to imagine the Irish would make it back this season, let alone go undefeated in the process. Yet they are, beating Baylor 88-69 Monday night to return to the national semifinals.

"It means so much to our program. I think it's a statement," McGraw said. "When Skylar (Diggins) came in, I think people expected that we would be in the Final Four and then when Skylar graduated I don't think anyone expected that we'd be back in the Final Four. So I think it says a lot about this team."

Jewell Loyd scored 30 points and the unbeaten Irish continued their quest for perfection in front of a raucous home crowd.

"I couldn't be prouder of this team," said McGraw, who is in her 27th season at Notre Dame. "This senior class came in unheralded and set all kind of records. To win it at home, to celebrate with our fans is special. Jewell Loyd, what a phenomenal game."

Natalie Achonwa added 19 points and 15 rebounds for the Irish (36-0), who will bring a perfect record into the Final Four for the first time, facing either Louisville or Maryland on Sunday night in Nashville.

The Irish did get a scare Monday when Achonwa hurt her left knee with just under five minutes left. McGraw said her senior center would have an MRI exam on Tuesday.

"It sucked the air right out of the room," McGraw said. "I don't know what it is yet. ... You hate to see a player go down like that."

Notre Dame beats Baylor 88-69 to get to Final Four

Written by Administrator
Tuesday, 01 April 2014 11:47

It's the fourth straight season that the Irish are in the national semifinals. Notre Dame became the sixth school to reach the Final Four in four straight seasons, joining UConn, LSU, Stanford, Louisiana Tech and Tennessee.

The loss ended the brilliant career of Baylor guard Odyssey Sims, who finished this season with 1,054 points — eight short of Jackie Stiles' single season NCAA record. Sims scored 33 points for Baylor (32-5), but had little help on offense. Her teammates were a combined 12 for 45 with no one else scoring in double digits.

"I had a great run. My four years, I've enjoyed it," Sims said. "Not one moment have I been unhappy at Baylor. I got to play with a lot of great players. This season is probably my most enjoyable. I like the team I've been around."

The victory extended Notre Dame's home winning streak to 28 games. Baylor was the last team to beat the Irish in South Bend — doing so on Dec. 5, 2012 — but that team had 6-foot-8 star Brittney Griner.

The Irish took control in the first half with senior Kayla McBride on the bench in early foul trouble. Trailing 21-17 midway through the first half, the Irish got going behind Achonwa and Loyd. Achonwa, who had a double-double in the first half, started a 14-0 run with a layup. Loyd then scored the next eight points, including a highlight reel three-point play that made it 24-21 and whipped up the sellout crowd, which included Diggins.

"That was huge," McGraw said. "We needed every single thing that she did. Jewell felt like she could score whenever she wanted. We were running things for her and she delivered on every possession."

By the time Sims hit a pullup in the lane with 5:32 left the Lady Bears trailed 31-24. The Irish led 44-32 at the half as Loyd, who earned most outstanding player of the region honors, finished with 21 points in the first 20 minutes.

Sims rallied the Lady Bears, scoring the first nine points of the second half to cut the deficit to

Notre Dame beats Baylor 88-69 to get to Final Four

Written by Administrator
Tuesday, 01 April 2014 11:47

46-41. After a Notre Dame basket Baylor was called for back-to-back offensive fouls — the eighth and ninth called in the game — and coach Kim Mulkey had seen enough, letting the officials know her displeasure. That earned her a technical foul.

The teams traded baskets over the next few minutes and Baylor closed to within 65-60 before Notre Dame took over by scoring 16 of the next 20 points, including eight from the free throw line. The Irish were 30 for 33 from the foul line in the game.

The game-changing run is when Achonwa got hurt. She went down holding her left knee and after a few moments got up with help and pointed to her teammates before heading to the locker room, telling them to get it done.

They followed their senior leader's advice and came away with the victory. She joined them for the celebration on the court.

—

Follow Doug on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/dougfeinberg>