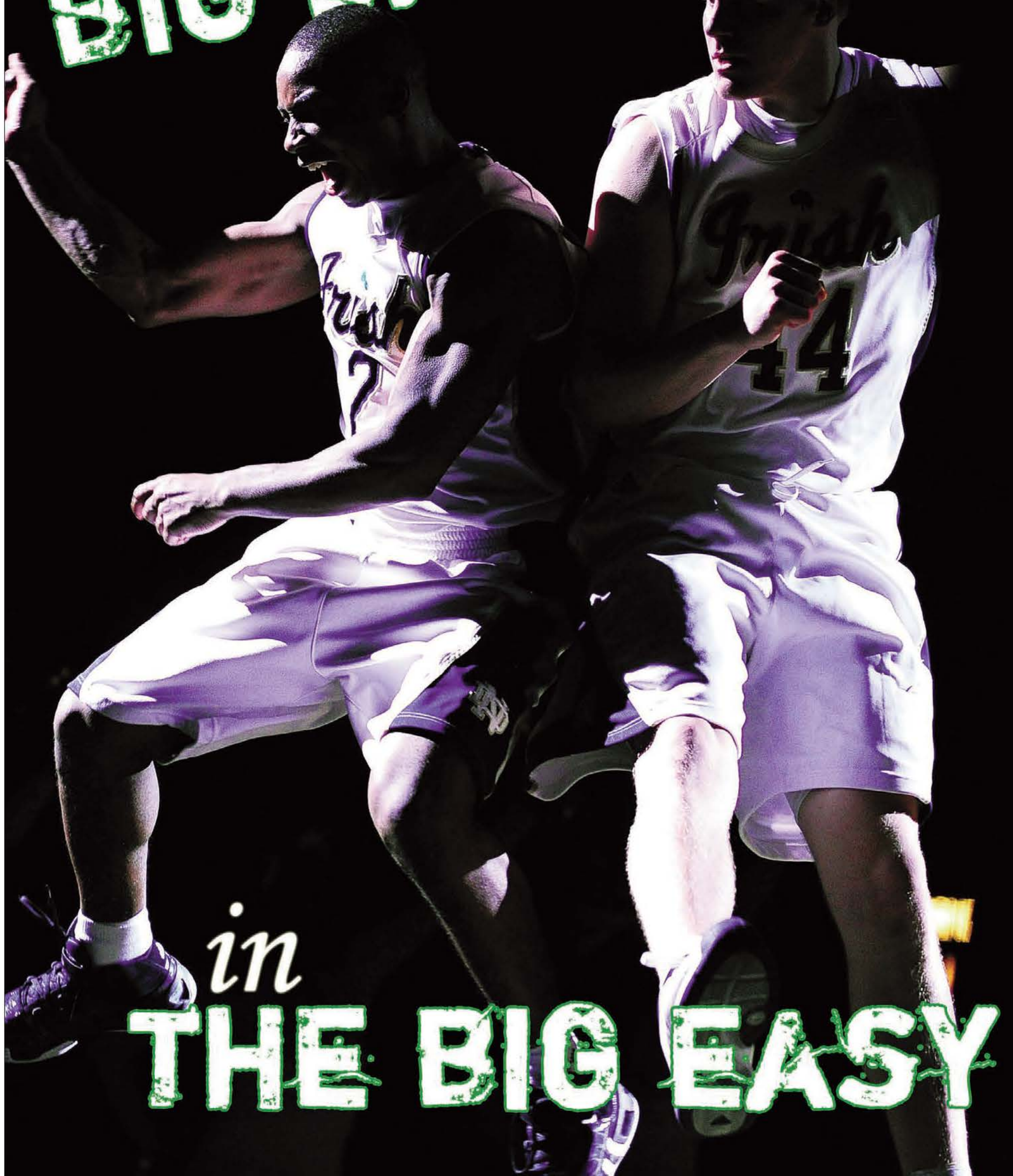


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BIG DANCE



in

THE BIG EASY

'Floor general' Jackson heart of Irish team

By CHRIS MASOUD
Sports Writer

Taking the game-winning shot as time expires can be the most exciting play in all of sports. Make it, and you're featured on SportsCenter's Top 10 plays and vaulted into legendary status in school history. Miss, and your entire career may be defined by what could have been.

So when senior guard Tory

Jackson missed the game-winning 3 in a 69-68 loss to St. John's, it could have marked the end of a brilliant four-year career.

"It looked good when I let it go, it felt good, but it didn't end up going down," Jackson said. "I think about it all the time, even when I hit the buzzer beater against Pittsburgh at halftime."

Trailing No. 7 West Virginia by two points in the final seconds of the Big East tournament semifinals, Jackson had another good

look at a game-winning 3, but was unrewarded as the Irish fell to the Mountaineers. Jackson said if the situation ever arises again, he won't hesitate to let it fly.

"When Kobe and Jordan and all those guys take those shots, they miss a lot of game-winning shots," Jackson said. "And when I look at it, I've missed some important shots, but I'm not going to lose confidence and not take that shot. I'm going to keep having confidence and taking that shot, and

that's what makes me me."

Coupled with a passion for the game and the willingness to sacrifice individual success for the sake of the team, it was an easy decision for Irish coach Mike Brey to name Jackson one of the team's captains.

"Unselfishness," Jackson said. "Growing up, I always loved to get my team involved. I do whatever it takes to win. At the same time, especially when a guy's hot, why not? If that's going to help us win, I'd rather take the win than score 50 points and lose. That's not good."

A prolific scorer in high school, Jackson ranks third all time on the Michigan scoring list as the state's two-time player of the year. Upon coming to Notre Dame, Jackson said he knew he would have to rely on his ball handling skills and court vision to break into a Big East starting lineup.

Leading the conference with 5.6 assists per game to go along with a top-10 assist-to-turnover ratio, it's safe to say the senior guard has made the transition successfully.

"To do that and take care of the ball at the same time, it's a great thing if it can get us more possessions," Jackson said. "Being ranked up there in the assist-to-turnover ratio, that's real good for me, that's real good for any point guard."

Playing in every contest since his first day at Notre Dame, Jackson had an immediate impact as a freshman. Named to the All-Big East rookie team, Jackson relied on his strengths as a defender before expanding his overall game.

"Just figuring out ways to stay on the floor," Jackson said. "I wasn't a big time, 30-point scorer, but I played well defensively when I was younger, especially sopho-

more year. As the years went on, I had to become a little bit of a scorer, getting more assists, and also defending the best player on the other team."

Guarding the likes of Villanova point guard Scottie Reynolds can be a daunting task for any defender, let alone one who is 5-11. But what he lacks in size, Jackson said he makes up for in toughness.

"I hate when anybody scores," Jackson said. "It's a passion. I take pride in my defense."

When an injury to senior forward Luke Harangody was followed by losses to Seton Hall, St. John's and Louisville, many considered the season over. But a string of six consecutive victories, including blowouts against No. 16 Pittsburgh and No. 22 Georgetown, has propelled Notre Dame to a No. 6 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

Jackson, who calls himself the floor general, says he embraces the task of stepping up and leading the team with a limited Harangody in the lineup.

"I love the challenge," Jackson said. "We've got to pick up the slack for what Gody had."

Jackson has answered the call, scoring 22 points against Connecticut in a victory many believed secured a tournament bid for the Irish. The senior guard was recently named to the Big East All-Tournament team, averaging 10.7 points, five assists and playing all 120 minutes in Madison Square Garden.

"It's basketball," Jackson said. "I've been playing this for awhile, so you kind of get that feeling, get into that zone where, especially when you get a mismatch, you got to have confidence, you got to have swag."

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IAN GAVLICK/The Observer

Irish point guard Tory Jackson drives for a lay-up in the second half of Notre Dame's 65-62 win over South Florida on Feb. 7. Jackson leads the Big East in assists this season with 5.6 per game.

Peoples a constant contributor in historic senior class

By MICHAEL BRYAN
Senior Sports Writer

While he may not have the accolades or numbers of classmates Luke Harangody and Tory Jackson, senior guard Jonathan Peoples has been a constant contributor to the winningest class in Notre Dame history in Big East play.

Peoples has played in every conference game for the Irish during his four years with the team and is very aware of the achievement.

"It means a lot to say that we did something like that," Peoples said. "We're always going to be remembered as the winningest senior class."

The senior captain is averaging a career-high 18.3 minutes per game this season but has played a key role for Irish coach Mike Brey and Notre Dame from his freshman year.

A Bellwood, Ill., native from St. Joseph High School, Peoples was recruited by Brey after averaging 15.2 points per game his senior year. After the Irish extended a scholarship offer, Peoples quickly accepted.

The transition to Notre Dame was both exciting and challenging for Peoples.

"It was everything I expected, everything I heard about. Beautiful campus, the people here are great," Peoples said. "I didn't know about parietals, I was kind of heated about that. It was a great experience my

freshman year though."

In the basketball program, Peoples had to make adjustments to 6 a.m. practices.

"The workouts in the morning had me, I just couldn't get through it for the first two months, and I was getting a little home sick," Peoples said. "Being around the older guys like Colin Falls, Rob Kurz, Russell Carter, they helped me adjust quickly."

While Peoples was learning from the experienced upperclassmen around him, he was still seeing time on the court as a reserve, appearing in all 16 Big East contests. Peoples played six minutes of time in Notre Dame's appearance in the NCAA Tournament, where the Irish were upset by Winthrop.

Peoples minutes and impact continued to grow through his sophomore and junior seasons when he became one of the first players off Brey's bench. The guard played in all 33 contests sophomore year and earned his first career starts his junior season against Marquette and Pittsburgh.

"I finally got the opportunity to start my first college game, and I was happy," Peoples said. "I was kind of nervous, but happy at the same time."

Evolving into a veteran leader by his senior year, Peoples was named a captain by Brey along with classmates Jackson and Harangody.

"He's smooth, he can score,



PAT COVENEY/The Observer

Irish guard Jonathan Peoples handles the ball during an 87-77 win over DePaul at Purcell Pavilion on Jan. 23. Peoples has played in every Big East game during his career at Notre Dame.

he can shoot the ball lights out," Jackson said. "He's a great guy and he knows how to play basketball."

Peoples was slotted as a guard in the starting lineup at the beginning of his senior campaign but has entered into a sixth-man role since the emergence of junior forward Tim Abromaitis. Still, Peoples has played a career-high number of minutes for his career and is hitting 3-pointers at a 40.8-percent clip.

"My jump shot has gotten a

lot better. I'm more of a defender now," Peoples said.

Peoples had the best performance of his career off the bench this season, scoring 23 points and grabbing six rebounds in a win over Providence.

While it looked like Peoples and Notre Dame had little shot of reaching the NCAA Tournament after a losing skid and the loss of Harangody to injury, the team put together a remarkable six-game winning streak to close out the year and

return to the Big Dance for the third time in four years.

"It's been a battle. I think we stayed together as a team but we lost games by not doing a couple little things," Peoples said. "We still have to prove something."

Peoples and the Irish will look to prove they can advance to their first Sweet 16 of their careers starting against Old Dominion at 12:25 p.m. today.

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Leaving a legacy

Luke Harangody returned to lead Notre Dame his senior season and will leave an all-time great

By **BILL BRINK**
Senior Staff Writer

On March 3, Luke Harangody became the first-ever Irish player to be inducted into the Purcell Pavilion's Ring of Honor. His No. 44 jersey climbed to the rafters, celebrating four years of awards, accolades and success.

"Seeing some of the players involved in this University, for me to be the first one, it was a tremendous honor," the senior forward said. "That was a very proud night for myself."

One of many.

Harangody will graduate as Notre Dame's second-leading scorer and rebounder. His class made the NCAA Tournament three out of four years and has won more games than any other class in school history. He was named the 2008 Big East Player of the Year, was a second-team All-American in 2008 and 2009 and became the first Notre Dame player to be named to the Big East first-team three times.

As a freshman, Harangody said he didn't anticipate it.

"No, there's no way I ever saw that," he said.

Harangody received four varsity letters at Andrean High School in Schererville, Ind., where he won two conference and three sectional championships. When he got to Notre Dame, he and then-freshman guard Tory Jackson played early in the season.

"We threw them in there, both of them were key guys as freshman," Irish coach Mike Brey said. "We went to the NCAA Tournament because they were ready as freshman to be men in this league. They have an unbelievable mental

and physical toughness, both of them, that I think has permeated through our group. It's helped some other guys who aren't at their level of mental and physical toughness-wise pick it up at times."

Harangody said he and Jackson entered their rookie seasons with a "business-like" attitude, which helped Notre Dame earn a No. 6 seed in the 2007 NCAA Tournament. The Irish lost to No. 11 seed Winthrop in the first round.

Harangody averaged 11.2 points per game that season in more than 20 minutes per game and became the first freshman since Troy Murphy to score in double figures in his first five games.

"[The NCAA Tournament freshman year] was a pretty memorable season because it was my first go-around with things," he said. "It was something I'll always remember."

Harangody, like any athlete, said he believes in off-season improvement, so he used the summer to hone his game as well as his fitness. The next season, he averaged 20.4 points and 10.6 rebounds per game.

"It all has to do with work ethic," he said. "Every summer, whether it's been working on my body or working on another part of my game, just get better every year."

It was that season that earned him conference Player of the Year honors.

The Irish earned a No. 5 seed in the Dance that year

and beat George Mason easily in the first round. Despite Harangody's 22 rebounds, No. 4 seed Washington State took down the Irish in the second round.

During Harangody's junior season, Notre Dame started 12-3 but lost seven straight games and dropped out of contention for the Tournament. It wasn't for a lack of production from Harangody: He led the team in scoring for 14 consecutive games and averaged a career-best 23.3 points and 11.8 boards per game. Harangody scored 30 points against Kentucky in the NIT quarterfinals and had a double-double in the semifinal loss to Penn State.

Then came decision time. In April 2009, Harangody, then a junior, declared his eligibility for the NBA Draft. He didn't hire an agent, however, which allowed him the opportunity to change his mind and return to school.

"I think when you are a kid shooting around at the park, every kid dreams of playing in the NBA and obviously I did and this has always been a dream of mine," he said on April 16, 2009. "So I mean for me, it's neat to be standing up here and announcing this decision today."

"This is a new territory for me. But, you know, one of the best things is that with the team I have, the teammates I have, I told them this week what I was going to do and they have been

so supportive, not only the team's leader but the guys that are going to be on the team next year and, you know, I wasn't very surprised at that because I know we have some of the best guys in the world here, in the country."

Those supportive teammates played a role in Harangody's decision to forgo the draft and return to school to finish his senior year.

"It was obvious to see that the NBA is a business," he said on July 15, 2009. "It's not like being at Notre Dame around the group of guys that we have. I realize it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be with a group like this."

Harangody said he wasn't ready to give up one last go-around with his teammates.

"It was one more year to be around the guys and get a senior year," Harangody said recently. "It's something I truly hold special. Now I get a chance to watch these guys succeed in the postseason and also get my degree."

Harangody said his parents and Brey helped him with the decision.

"[Brey] was very helpful throughout the whole process. He wasn't like, 'Come back to school,'" Harangody said. "He gave me options to go out there. He was always open to me, which I really appreciated. In the end, my parents and I and coach Brey sat down and talked about the whole situation and I just felt more com-



Notre Dame senior Luke Harangody dunks over a UCLA defender during the Irish's 84-73 victory over the Bruins on Dec. 19.

fortable coming back to school here."

That senior season didn't pan out quite like he planned. At first the Irish played well, but once they got into conference play they had two rough stretches, losing three out of five and four out of seven at various points. Worse still, Harangody suffered a bone bruise in his knee on Feb. 11 against Seton Hall and missed five games because of the injury. At one point the Irish were 6-8 in the conference and the season's funeral march was beginning.

Even with a serious injury, Harangody wouldn't be slowed. He missed the next game, against St. John's, but convinced everyone he would play against Louisville on Feb. 17.

"He kind of talked us into he was going to try and play," Brey said. "He had everybody, the doctors the trainers, me. 'I'm going.' He didn't bring any street clothes. 'I'm playing.'"

It took Brey to stop him.

"He wasn't feeling good [after the shoot-around]," Brey said. "I told him after shoot-around, 'Well I'm not playing you so how's that? Does that make the decision easier? You're not ready.'"

But then a funny thing happened: Notre Dame slowed down its offense and had success. The Irish lost in double overtime to Louisville, but won their next three games, including two over top-15 opponents, to finish the season. All without Harangody.

"What I've been really happy with, since he's been down, how he's been helping [freshman forward Jack] Cooley and [junior forward Carleton] Scott," Brey said. "His voice with those guys during the game, halftime, I could hear his voice in the locker room.

He's a leader and kind of a coach for us."

"I think you just try to keep their confidence up," Harangody said of his approach with Scott and Cooley. "At first, the first game against St. John's after I left, a couple guys didn't really know how to approach it. But it as it

went on and they got more practice time it was like night and day."

Harangody recovered enough to play in Notre Dame's last regular-season game, an overtime win on the road against Marquette. He came off the bench for 11

minutes and scored five points. He also played in all three of Notre Dame's Big East tournament games, averaging 14 points and 24 minutes per game.

Harangody said after Notre Dame's 50-45 win over Pittsburgh in the quarterfinals that his knee was getting better but not yet 100 percent and that he was proud of what the team had done in his absence.

"I was curious to see how two games in a row would go with my conditioning," he said. "I'm still not there yet. But I think every day it's getting a little better."

"This run we made at the end of the season, it was pretty special. These guys have played great without me."

He's back now, ready to add NCAA Tournament success to his extraordinary career.

"When he got here he made us believe again," Brey said. "He was an impact guy. Look at what he's done throughout his career."

"He's been one of the greatest to ever wear a uniform here. Flat out."

"I realize it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be with a group like this."

Luke Harangody
Irish forward

"This run we made at the end of the season, it was pretty special. These guys have played great without me."

Luke Harangody
Irish forward

"He's been one of the best greatest to ever wear a uniform here. Flat out."

Mike Brey
Irish coach



Irish senior Luke Harangody is introduced before scoring 37 points in an 83-65 win over Cincinnati on Feb. 4.

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Walk-on Andree makes impact leading underclassmen

By MATT GAMBER
Sports Writer

Luke Harangody and Tory Jackson will undoubtedly leave major legacies as four-year starters and the leaders of Notre Dame's winningest senior class.

While walk-on senior forward Tim Andree won't leave the same mark on the face of the Irish program, his impact on the Notre Dame program could have long-term effects because of his work this season with freshmen Mike Broghammer, Jack Cooley and Tom Knight.

"I've done a lot of stuff in this offseason with the freshmen," Andree said. "Just a lot of getting extra workouts with them and helping them get in shape. We haven't really had a true group of freshmen in a while like this, and it's been fun having these guys in. They're all really good players and fun to be around."

As a walk-on, Andree knew his biggest role wouldn't necessarily be on the court during games. His primary role as a practice player has taught him "to let the little things go," he said.

"I know going into every year what the deal is," Andree said. "Basketball's a fun game, we're all playing the game of basketball because we enjoy it and have fun with it."

Andree's father, Tim, played at Notre Dame under legendary coach Digger Phelps from 1979-83. While Andree's career obviously didn't follow that of his father, he said he has enjoyed his Notre Dame experiences, especially those with the Irish team.

"My dad came in here in a totally different situation than I did. He was a McDonald's high school All-American, I clearly wasn't," Andree said. "I've just tried to come out and play hard and be my own person. It's sometimes tough living in the shadow of it, but it hasn't been too hard."

Andree's mother also attended Notre Dame, and so accepting a role with the Irish program was almost a no-brainer, Andree said.

"I grew up always wanting to come to Notre Dame, so when [Irish coach Mike Brey] told me I had the opportunity to play here, it was tough to turn down," he said.

Andree said the bonds he has formed with his teammates has reaffirmed that decision and made his Notre Dame experience. Andree lives off campus with Harangody and senior guard Ben Hansbrough.

"When we're not here [on the court], we're just friends," Andree said. "We're not really thinking about basketball, but living a normal life."

A management consulting

"I've just tried to come out and play hard and be my own person."

Tim Andree
Irish forward



VANESSA GEMPIS/The Observer

Irish forward Tim Andree handles the ball against North Florida in the second half of an 86-65 Notre Dame victory. Andree, a walk-on, has been a standout in practice working with freshmen this season.

major and theology minor, Andree said he is waiting to hear from law schools. While his future almost certainly won't be in basketball, he said he will miss his experiences with the Irish basketball team, and especially with Brey.

"Coach Brey treats us all like men. There's a lot of mutual respect between us," Andree said. "He's very funny, he's got a great personality, and he's a lot of fun to be around. He's given me a lot more confidence."

"My high school coaches, they relied more on a negative style of coaching. Here, it's all about the positives, and he makes you believe in yourself."

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'THE NEW ORLEANS OPEN'

THURSDAY

NO. 6 Notre Dame (23-11)

SATURDAY

NO. 11 Old Dominion (26-8)

NO. 3 Baylor (25-7)

NO. 14 Sam Houston St. (25-7)

SWEET 16

Irish coach Mike Brey said his team would refuse to look past the opening weekend of the NCAA Tournament. In the South Region, Notre Dame will first face Old Dominion, the Colonial Athletic Association champs, Thursday at 12:25 p.m. If the Irish advance, they'll face the winner of Thursday's game between Baylor and Sam Houston State.

SOFIA ITURBE | Observer Graphic