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Make it 8 in a row: 5 takeaways from Gophers win against Nebraska



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Dupree McBrayer drove to the basket for what looked like just an average shot with 10:47 to go in the second half. Instead, he grabbed some air and dunked the ball with his left hand for a 65-44 Gophers lead.

There were more than a few electrifying plays like that for the Gophers as their winning streak hit eight games with a 88-73 decision over Nebraska (12-17, 6-11) in their final game at the Barn for the 2016-17 season. The Gophers improved to 11-6 in the Big Ten and pushed their overall record to 23-7.

“Eight games in a row in this conference is not easy to do,” said head coach Richard Pitino.

Actually, the first half was a bit slow going for both teams before the Gophers went on a 10-0 late in the half and took a 40-27 lead into the locker room. The Gophers shot 50 percent in the first half but failed to make any 3-pointers in five chances, plus at one point Nebraska led offensive rebounds by an 8-4 count.

That really didn't matter when the Gophers put up 48 second-half points, shooting 62.1 percent and 55.9 percent for the game. The Gophers pulled away and led by as many as 24 points.

Here are five takeaways from the Gophers' eighth consecutive victory.

1. Eight wins in a row, and this time it wasn't very close. The Gophers have had their share of close games, overtime games (even double OT once) and even a couple heartbreaking losses this season. That's why it's almost a nice refreshing change of pace to see a game like the one against Nebraska, with double-digit leads reminiscent of non-conference basketball.

“We haven’t had too many comfortable wins like that,” Pitino said.

Junior Nate Mason quietly led his team with 25 points. He had one of those nights where you look up at the scoreboard after a while and notice how many points he’s racked up. Going a perfect 6-for-6 from the foul line will help that. He also shot 9-for-13 and had four assists. It’s almost expected the Mason have these consistent nights to help his team.

“We’re just all clicking right now,” Mason said.

After his 11-block and no-fouls effort against Penn State, the tides looked to be back in the usual routine for Reggie Lynch when he was called for the first foul of the game at the 1:09 mark. Instead, he played 28 minutes, scored 11 points, six rebounds, six blocks and three assists all while picking up just three fouls.

2. McBrayer was in the zone. Sophomore McBrayer seemed to be all over the court Thursday. Just after Mason hit a 3-pointer for a 20-point Gophers lead in the second half, McBrayer drained a trey of his own. The next Gophers bucket was also his – another shot from beyond the arc. This time, he took the ball down the court and decided to go for the open look in transition rather than set up a play. The shot hit nothing but net, and it just looked like he was in the zone.

A few minutes later, he dribbled the ball along the baseline and made a no-look pass to Jordan Murphy in the lane. Murphy promptly went in for a two-handed dunk.

McBrayer finished with six assists in the game to go with his 16 points and two rebounds. He went 2-for-3 from beyond the arc and at the foul line.

3. Akeem Springs, Darin Haugh honored on senior night. Plus, a few fresh faces on the floor. It was a little surprising to see Springs kept off the scoresheet. He just had one 3-pointer to his name, which didn’t come until midway through the second half. Afterward when Pitino addressed the home crowd, he mentioned that Springs had a back injury. He only played 19 minutes, but he didn’t seem too worse for the wear the way he was running around the court dodging celebrating teammates after his postgame speech.

The Gophers had the game well in hand late in the second half. So, the barnyard of students started a “we want Dar-in!” chant with a few minutes left. Other fans joined in, imploring Pitino to put senior and Prior Lake-native Darin Haugh in the game. They erupted when Haugh checked into the game. He played four minutes and grabbed a defensive rebound. The walk-on for the Gophers had a full scholarship for 2016-17.

Haugh wasn’t the only bench player who got a chance to play. In the final couple of minutes, Pitino also had freshman Brady Rudrud, junior Gaston Diedhiou and sophomore Stephon Sharp in the game. Rudrud scored a bucket, which of course drew a big cheer from teammates. Freshman Michael Hurt also played 13 minutes and grabbed three rebounds.

4. Murphy with yet another double-double and monster dunk. It was another double-double night for Murphy, who scored 20 points and grabbed 11 rebounds, along with two blocks. He shot 7-for-10 and made 6-of-9 free throws. That makes six double-doubles in the past seven games for Murphy, who once again showed off his dunking skills in front of a packed Williams Arena.

He’s often talked about how his game has gotten better with his rebounding. Once he gets a couple boards, that helps him get his game going. Whatever works.

5. Dick Jonckowski signs off. Thursday’s game didn’t just signify the end of the 2016-17 home season for Gophers men’s basketball at Williams Arena. For the last time, public address announcer Dick Jonckowski called the game. He’s setting his headset aside after spending 31 years calling the basketball action courtside. The really astonishing tidbit is realizing that Jonckowski is one of only two public address announcers to be heard at the Barn in the building’s 89 years. Jules Perlt preceded Jonckowski for a 58-year run.

The scoreboard focused in on Jonckowski postgame as he rattled off the scoring numbers for the final time. Then, he had a chance to say a few words to those that remained from the 12,321 in attendance.

“It really has been a thrill,” Jonckowski said, who paused to compose himself as fans applauded. “That’s 31 years of Golden Gopher basketball. Thank you!”

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