

Duke wins a tale of two halves over Louisville, 84-73

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LOUISVILLE, KY— Without Mikel Brown Jr., Louisville came out firing against Duke at the KFC Yum! Center. However, the better team prevailed by the time the final buzzer sounded.

Louisville's main offensive threat, Mikel Brown Jr., was once again sidelined with a nagging back injury. Brown (16.6 ppg, 5.1 apg) had not played in the previous four games, and Louisville went 2-2 in that span, with losses to Tennessee and Stanford. Brown's relentless skill on offense has made him a top ten NBA draft prospect, but against Duke, the Cardinals had to do without.

In the first half, it seemed that Louisville was not missing Brown at all. Ryan Conwell (24 pts, 7 reb, 4-11 3PT) was the offensive star, hitting three three pointers in the first two minutes, with Louisville jumping out to a 10 point lead by the under 12 media timeout.

Duke looked well out of sorts in the first half. Three early fouls on Patrick Ngongba stifled the Duke defense. Cameron Boozer (27 pts, 8 reb) led the Blue Devils in scoring, and he was the only one making a real impact in the first half.

Duke trailed by 14 points at one point late in the first half, which is the largest deficit they have faced all season.

The second half was a completely different story. If there is a true MVP, it is the halftime adjustments that Jon Scheyer and his staff made. Louisville, one of the premier three-point shooting teams in the country, was thrown completely off course in the second half. Ryan Conwell was face guarded on almost every possession. When the game turned to Louisville's other deep threat, Isaac McKneely (6 pts, 1-5 3PT), he was less than stellar.

Duke's defense was the major reason that they were able to win this game, but their offense was led by Caleb Foster (20 pts, 9-13 FG), who was the best player on the floor in the second half. The second half was filled with Foster's relentless driving, slashing, kicking, and of course, scoring. That's the thing with this Duke team— it isn't just Cameron Boozer.

As always, Boozer was electric. Isaiah Evans (23 pts, 4-10 3PT) was also continuously bringing Duke back into the game with timely threes and vital buckets. However, Foster's ability to lead the offense from the point was a key difference in the Blue Devils out-scoring Louisville 46-26 during the second half.

Between Duke's defensive adjustments and their ability to score, they have proved time and time again that they belong in the same tier as the Michigan-Arizona tandem that has led the headlines all season. Unfortunately for Louisville, it's possible they showed they are a bit one-dimensional. Living and dying by the three is one thing, but when you're trying to do it without your best player against a team like Duke, not many coaches can scheme up a way to win that battle.

These two teams play again later this month at Cameron Indoor— hopefully, both squads will be completely healthy and ready to battle again.