

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP | RECAP

# Irish eyes are rocking: Notre Dame lifted by wild title win

By DOUG FEINBERG  
Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It took a historic comeback and an epic shot to give Notre Dame its second national championship.

The last-second 3-pointer by Arike Ogunbowale that lifted the Irish over Mississippi State 61-58 Sunday night was a riveting — and fitting — conclusion to the greatest women's Final Four, and maybe any basketball championship.

Coach Muffet McGraw's team has been the comeback queens of the NCAA Tournament, with Ogunbowale conjuring a bit of magic, not once, but twice.

The junior guard provided an astonishing encore to her game-winning shot that beat UConn in the Final Four two days earlier. That capped another double-digit rally.

The Irish had to come back from halftime deficits in their last four NCAA games.

"The fighting spirit of Notre Dame is just amazing," McGraw said. "Relentless, competitive. They have a swagger, they believe in themselves with the confidence that starts with Arike and Marina (Mabrey) and just filters down through the team."

The Irish found themselves down 30-17 at the half and 15 in the third quarter before finally getting on track. Ogunbowale epitomized the Irish struggles on offense. She was 1-for-10 from the field in the first half and missed her first two shots in the third quarter. The frustration was boiling over as she punched the padded support behind the basket.

But then it all started to turn. The resiliency the Irish had shown all season while



AP Photo/Ron Schwane  
Notre Dame's Arike Ogunbowale (24) celebrates with teammates after making a 3-point basket to defeat Mississippi State 61-58 in the final of the women's NCAA Final Four college basketball tournament Sunday in Columbus, Ohio.

dealing with four season-ending knee injuries was there.

A 16-1 run to end the third quarter tied the game. A back-and-forth last 10 minutes ended when Ogunbowale hit

her off-balance floater from in front of Notre Dame's bench to give the Irish to their first title since 2001. The 3-pointer from the wing came from nearly the same angle as her shot that beat the Huskies.

"To do that twice in one weekend, the biggest stage in college basketball, it's crazy," Ogunbowale said.

Notre Dame returned to campus Monday, busing back from Columbus and greeted by a few thousand fans. Ogunbowale's shot was on constant play on the bus.

"Watching the shot again, again and again and seeing everyone's reaction was special," McGraw said. "We have so many former players there, 25 from all different years. We were celebrating for them. We got back to campus and they had a huge rally for us and that was fun."

McGraw says she's ready for some down time and happy to bask in the title. The Hall of Fame coach was noncommittal whether the team would visit the White House if invited.

"We'll discuss it with the team and make a decision

if the offer is extended," McGraw told The Associated Press by phone Monday.

There's no reason to think Notre Dame couldn't repeat as champions next year. Most of the team is back and the Irish will get the return of Brianna Turner — one of four players sidelined this season with knee ligament injuries.

Even if they do win it all again next season, it will be nearly impossible to repeat the drama of this run.

"Phenomenal for women's basketball. Three exciting games. I hope the ratings reflect it," McGraw said after the game. "The crowd was tremendous tonight. Everybody came back. Just an incredible job by Columbus and the local community. Great support for women's basketball and definitely one of the best Final Fours since 2001, right?"

# FINAL FOUR: DiVincenzo joins rare Final Four game club

Continued from 1B

With Michigan refusing to go away early in the second half, he opened his game-sealing run with an around-the-back dribble to get to the hoop and get fouled. On the other end, he delivered a two-handed rejection of Michigan's Charles Matthews — his second block of the game — when Matthews tried to bring it into the paint.

"Blocked shots, definitely," DiVincenzo said when asked if he enjoys 3s or rejections more. "I pride myself on defense and just bringing energy to the team."

The 3 that sealed it came from a big step behind the arc and gave Villanova a 62-44 lead with a bit less than 8 minutes left.

About the only drama left was whether DiVincenzo could unwrap himself from his teammates' mob hug to toss the ball underhanded toward the scoreboard after the buzzer. He succeeded there, too.

Mikal Bridges finished

with 19 in what could be his final audition for the NBA. Player of the Year Jalen Brunson was celebrating despite an off night — nine points and two rebounds. His struggles barely mattered.

What a couple months it's been for Philly. First the Eagles. Now this. The Super Bowl, though, was a classic. This one was only beautiful to one team.

Michigan (33-8) came out playing tough-nosed defense it relied on over a 14-game winning streak that got the Wolverines to their second final in six years.

Moe Wagner scored 11 early points to continue his great play in the Final Four. Villanova started 1 for 9 from 3-point range. And yet, after DiVincenzo banged down a 3 from a step behind the arc for Villanova's second of the night, coach John Beilein looked at the scoreboard and saw his team behind, 23-21.

"The way DiVincenzo shot the ball, it was just incredible for us to try to win that game

with the roll he went on," Beilein said.

If his first 3 wasn't demoralizing enough, DiVincenzo made another, then took a bounce pass from Brunson for a dunk, then paid it forward with an assist to Omari Spellman. It was part of a 23-7 run that gave the Wildcats a nine-point lead at halftime; they never looked back.

For the record, DiVincenzo has no problem starting games on the bench.

He's been willing to do whatever's needed since he arrived in 2015. His season cut short because of a knee injury, he was healthy enough to run the scout squad for Villanova during its first title run. Some on the team said he did Oklahoma star Buddy Hield better than Hield.

But maybe a more apt comparison is to ... Bill Walton and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar?

DiVincenzo joins them in the rare club of players to crack 30 points while also shooting better than 66 percent from the floor in a Final Four game.



AP Photo/David J. Phillip  
Villanova guard Donte DiVincenzo drives to the basket over Michigan guard Charles Matthews (1) during the second half in the championship game of the Final Four NCAA college basketball tournament Monday in San Antonio.

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