

Drew Pember vs UCLA 3/16/2023 – In-Person

This was Drew Pember's first game against a team with real length and athleticism since late December, and it was evident early. Pember really struggled in the first ten minutes when bodied-up by Jaime Jaquez and Kenneth Nwuba. He repeatedly tried to throw the ball through the tough defensive hands of UCLA's defense leading to easy deflections. With a lot of defensive focus given to Pember, he never found any space for himself until the game was well put away by the Bruins. He had an ugly sidestep 3 (19:30 1st), another bad airball later in the half (9:20 1st), and had an awkward pull-up from inside the arc (14:00 1st). His shot started to fall later in the game once the UCLA defense had stopped keying in on him. I wasn't a fan of how his handle survived contact - Pember turned the ball over a couple times trying to absorb the contact of defenders. I have serious concerns about Pember's frame holding up to NBA size.

Pember's stat profile suggested to me that he was great at drawing fouls (he led the NCAA in FTM) but he looked pretty stiff with the ball in the post. He has shot multiple threes per game with good efficiency, but his three point shot was a pretty slow load-up. Overall, I was pretty disappointed by Pember's offense – in my opinion, it doesn't offer much upside unless he becomes a shooting specialist.

Pember had a better game defensively, including three 1-on-1 blocks in transition chasing down UCLA wings (6:50 1st block on Jaquez, 4:00 1st block on Tyger Campbell, 10:30 2nd). His high hips make it difficult for Pember to stay with penetrating ballhandlers, but he seems like a solid helpside defender in the post.

Overall, I was not impressed by Pember. The strength and frame issues, serious limitations on both ends, and generally average feel all give me pause. There's a chance he'll unlock a bit more with NBA strength and conditioning training, but for now, I would not consider signing Pember to an NBA contract.