

## Pitt falls to No. 3 Texas, 78-62

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By Ray Fittipaldo, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Jamie Squire/Getty Images

Pitt forward Dante Taylor controls the ball as Texas forward/center Alexis Wangmene defends during the O'Reilly Auto Parts CBE Classic at the Sprint Center championship game at Sprint Center in Kansas City, Mo. last night.

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- There are no moral victories in competitive sports, especially for a team that came within two points of making the Final Four last season. But by hanging with No. 3 Texas for more than 32 minutes last night the Panthers can take solace knowing that they can compete with the best teams in the nation.

Texas finally put Pitt's upset bid to rest and pulled away for a 78-62 victory in the championship game of the O'Reilly Auto Parts CBE Classic at the Sprint Center, but Pitt made the Longhorns work extra hard to earn it.

"We can build a lot from that game," said junior center Gary McGhee, who recorded his first career double-double with 11 points and 10 rebounds and was named to the all-tournament team. "We learned we can fight, and we learned that we can play with anybody."

Coach Jamie Dixon had a different perspective. His team had a four-point lead with 16:04 remaining in the game. For Dixon, the game was viewed as a lost opportunity.

"We expected to win," Dixon said. "We didn't expect to come in here and be encouraged by a loss. There are some things we can gain from this, but there is no satisfaction in a loss."

Texas coach Rick Barnes came away impressed with the Panthers, who made up for their lack of size and experience with mental toughness and determination in the face of adversity.

Pitt had to overcome foul trouble and some shoddy offensive execution to stay in the game.

"Someone told me they were picked to finish ninth in the Big East," Barnes said. "If that's the ninth place team from the Big East then the Big East will be a great league this year."

Pitt (4-1) and Texas (4-0) were tied, 51-51, with 10:48 remaining, but the Longhorns outscored the Panthers, 27-11, over the final 10 1/2 minutes of the game. The Longhorns shot 65 percent in the second half while Pitt shot just 36 percent.

"We played hard, but their depth wore us down at the end and we didn't execute offensively at the end," Dixon said. "They got better shots down the stretch."

Texas had three seniors in its starting lineup. Pitt, meanwhile, started five players who had one career start among them before this season, a lineup that included two juniors, two sophomores and a redshirt freshman.

The contrast between the two teams was stark early on as Texas built a 32-23 lead with 4:42 remaining in the first half, but the Panthers found ways to stay close and eventually overtook the Longhorns before the buzzer sounded before halftime.

That was a most unlikely event considering how the game had unfolded to that point. Texas center Dexter Pittman got Pitt's centers into early foul trouble. Freshman Dante Taylor picked up his second foul with 13:44 remaining in the first half and McGhee picked up his second foul with 12:09 remaining.

That forced Dixon to play 6-foot-9 freshman J.J. Richardson at center. Richardson had played only three minutes in Pitt's first four games. Richardson gave Pitt some quality minutes, and the Panthers actually made up some ground with the little-used reserve in the game.

Pitt was able to take a 34-32 lead into the locker room at halftime. Pitt scored the final 11 points of the half. Freshman Lamar Patterson made 3-pointers 35 seconds apart to tie the score, and Taylor made two free throws to give Pitt its first lead of the game.

Texas only had four field goals over the final 12 1/2 minutes of the half as Pitt clawed its way back into the game behind some tenacious defense.

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of the halftime score was that Pitt did not play particularly well. The Panthers had nine turnovers and had trouble handling Texas' pressure defense.

"We battled," Dixon said. "We were in position, but it wasn't because of our execution. It was more because of our will."

The Panthers were able to take the lead by shooting 44 percent from the field and 80 percent from the free-throw line while Texas shot 41 percent from the field and 50 percent from the line.

And even though Pitt played with a smaller lineup, the Panthers had the rebounding edge, 18-16.

In the second half, Pitt boosted the lead to 43-39 with 16:09 remaining. It appeared the game would turn shortly thereafter when Brad Wanamaker was called for an intentional foul when attempting to block a Gary Johnson shot.

The subsequent free throws and a J'Covan Brown basket gave Texas the lead again, 46-43. But Pitt would not go away. Brad Wanamaker and Gary McGhee made back-to-back baskets to give Pitt the lead again, 47-46 with 12:03 remaining.

The teams traded the lead back and forth for the next few minutes. The decisive stretch came shortly thereafter. Johnson gave Texas the lead for good after converting a three-point play with 10:31 left, the first points of a 14-3 run that finally gave the Longhorns some breathing room and its first double-digit lead of the game with 6:23 remaining.

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**NOTES** -- The loss was the first for Pitt coach Jamie Dixon during the month of November. He had won his previous 35 games in November, and it was the first loss for the Panthers in the same month since a loss to South Florida in 2001, a streak of 38 consecutive games ... Texas' starting point guard Varez Ward was taken from the court on a stretcher after injuring his right knee during pregame warmups.

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Check out Ray Fittipaldo's Pitt B-Ball blog and Paul Zeise's Pitt Stop videos about football exclusively on [PG+](#), a members-only web site from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Our [introduction to PG+](#) gives you all the details.



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