

# Cal comes up short against Syracuse

By Jeff Faraudo  
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NEW YORK — The news was bad for the Cal basketball team even before the game started, and it got only worse. Much worse.

Just hours after learning that senior Theo Robertson would not play because of a right foot injury, the 13th-ranked Golden Bears were pummeled by Syracuse 95-73 in the semifinals of the Coaches vs. Cancer tournament at Madison Square Garden on Thursday.

The Orange (3-0), playing in front of a supportive New York crowd, not only was too big and strong or the Bears (2-1), but quicker and more aggressive.

"I don't know if Syracuse is a great gauge for whether we're any good or not," Cal coach Mike Montgomery said. "They're pretty big, and we're not. I don't think they felt threatened."

Syracuse blocked nine shots, scored 19 points off 15 Cal turnovers and forged a 41-12 scoring advantage off the bench.

Of course, Cal's bench was one man shorter when Robertson, the De La Salle High grad who averaged 18 points the first two games, was declared out. Montgomery still thought his starting small forward might play after sitting out practice Wednesday, but

his pain was worse Thursday.

Montgomery said there is no definitive diagnosis but confirmed Robertson will not play in today's third-place game against 15th-ranked Ohio State, a 77-73 loser to No. 6 North Carolina. Robertson wore a protective boot on his foot Thursday as a precaution.

"We're certainly not going to risk him at this stage of the season," Montgomery said. "First glimpse, they don't think there's anything (seriously wrong) there, but obviously with the amount of pain he's having, there must be something."

Unable to score over Syracuse inside, the Bears relied on the perimeter game that led the nation in 3-point accuracy a year ago. Senior Jerome Randle scored 25 points, including 5-for-9 from 3-point range against Syracuse's long-armed 2-3 zone defense.

The rest of the team combined to shoot 1-for-11 from beyond the arc, with Patrick Christopher misfiring on all seven of his attempts in a quiet 12-point performance.

"We didn't help Patrick get on rhythm," Montgomery said. "Patrick is a good shooter, but he lost his confidence."

The game was reminiscent of Cal's 93-66 road loss a year ago to a Missouri team that also overwhelmed the Bears with superior size and athletic prowess.

"They just came out and they were the aggressor," Randle said of Syracuse, which shot 57 percent from the floor. "We backed down today."

Montgomery tried to walk a fine line afterward,

acknowledging the aspects of the game that were disappointing, including being disorganized defensively at times.

Referring to Syracuse forward Wesley Johnson, who had 17 points and 11 rebounds, Montgomery said, "(He) just jumped up above us like we weren't there. I'm sure we did get very discouraged."

What Montgomery didn't say is there probably isn't a team in the Pac-10 quite like Syracuse, with its nasty zone defense and physical nature.

"You're gonna lose games," he said. "Would I have liked to play better? Yes. If we don't have the ability to bounce back, yeah, we're going to have tough time."

Senior forward Jamal Boykin, who had 14 points and eight rebounds, said the Bears are eager to begin the recovery process immediately.

"I don't think we represented who we are as a basketball team," Boykin said.

Deon Thompson had 15 points and 12 rebounds, and North Carolina managed to hold on against Ohio State (2-1). The Tar Heels (4-0), who led by 19 points with 10:23 to play, will face Syracuse in today's championship game.

SYRACUSE 95,  
CAL 73 NEXT GAME: Today, vs. Ohio State, 2 p.m.  
TV: ESPN2