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Pittsburgh fends off Shockers with 68-55 win

By Paul Suellentrop
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KANSAS CITY, Mo. —If nothing else, playing Pittsburgh should prepare Wichita State for Southern Illinois.

The Panthers handled the Shockers 68-55 with the suffocating defense and efficient offense that SIU so often uses. Pitt's physical man-to-man defense forced 24 turnovers. Its patient offense worked the shot clock and wore down WSU on Monday in the CBE Classic at the Sprint Center.

"They're like a football team," WSU coach Gregg Marshall said. "It's like a team that was able to milk the clock. They kept the chains moving and it was very difficult."

WSU (2-1) made 18 baskets, nine in each half. It committed 13 turnovers in the first half, 11 in the second. Every time it made a run, Pitt turned up its defense and forced turnovers or missed shots.

"With a team like that, we can't make too many turnovers," WSU guard Toure Murry said. "It was mainly us making mistakes, like not making the right decisions, not making the right pass."

On offense, the Panthers (4-0) let their guards take over late in the shot clock. Travon Woodall led Pitt with 19 points; Ashton Gibbs added 18. The Panthers spread the defense and let their guards drive. They also drew fouls and opened up offensive rebounds for the big men.

"We thought we had the quicker guards, and we wanted to use penetration," Pitt coach Jamie Dixon said. "They have longer, bigger guards, but we thought we had better guys off the dribble."

The turnovers began to unravel WSU late in the second half. The Shockers trailed 23-19 with 6:20 remaining and had the ball. David Kyles lost it out of bounds, one of several turnovers Marshall didn't consider forced by the Panthers.

"We were sloppy with the basketball," Marshall said.

Pitt took a 25-19 lead on two free throws. After a Murry miss, WSU's Graham Hatch lost the ball against pressure by Pitt's Lamar Patterson. Dante Taylor stole the ball from Murry, leading to a layup for Nasir Robinson and a 27-19 lead.

The Shockers finished the half with three turnovers in their final four possessions.

"We kind of rattled them a little bit," Woodall said.

WSU made two rallies in the second half. It cut the 11 point halftime lead to five early in the half. Pitt pushed it back to 11.

A layup by J.T. Durley, off a pass from Kenny Manigault, cut Pitt's lead to 43-40 with 13 minutes remaining. WSU had two chances to cut into the lead — Gabe Blair and Manigault missed shots in the lane. Then the turnovers mounted again. Blair walked. Kyles lost the ball. Murry threw a bad pass and Stutz lost the ball out of bounds.

Pitt's Gary McGhee dunked for a 49-40 lead and WSU didn't get any closer.

Murry led WSU with 20 points. Playing the point in place of suspended senior Clevin Hannah, he committed six turnovers and didn't record an assist. Durley added 15 points. Blair scored nine off the bench. Starters Kyles and Hatch didn't score.

Hannah returns tonight. Pitt was also short-handed, with starting guard Jermaine Dixon out with an injury.

"They do so many good things to defend you," Marshall said. "When you get down as we were, 10 points or so, they make it very difficult too come back. We were just too sloppy tonight with our execution."

Check Paul Suellentrop's Shocker blog at blogs.kansas.com/shockwaves. Reach him at 316-269-6760 or psuellentrop@wichitaeagle.com.

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