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## Rutgers makes aggressive play pay off

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The message came across loud and clear to the Rutgers men's basketball team after last Sunday's dismal home loss to Vermont.

Be aggressive.

"We went hard this entire week, really hard actually," senior center Hamady N'Diaye said. "We had to reward ourselves with something today."

The reward was an 83-75 victory over Massachusetts in Friday's semifinals of the Legends Classic. N'Diaye contributed 14 points and four blocks off the bench and sophomore guard Mike Rosario chalked up 22 points before a pro-Rutgers crowd of about 5,000 at Boardwalk Hall.

Five players reached double figures in scoring as the Scarlet Knights (3-1) dished out 19 assists and shot 55.8 percent from the field. They will face either No. 2 Michigan State or Florida in tonight's final at 8 p.m.

Massachusetts (2-3) couldn't throw the ball in the ocean, hitting just 38.7 percent from the floor, but posted a 17-7 edge on the offensive glass and narrowed a 19-point deficit to just four in the second half.

"It was a good bounce-back win for us," Rutgers coach Fred Hill said. "But for all the good things we did, we lost our composure for a five- or six-minute stretch."

It was more like 14 minutes, as a 60-41 lead at the 15:23 mark of the second half shrank to 79-75 with 1:31 left. But three free throws by junior guard Mike Coburn (13 points, seven assists) closed the deal.

"We went away from what got us the lead," Hill said.

That was Rosario, who racked up 18 first-half points on blistering 7-of-9 shooting.

"When I bring a lot of energy and a lot of passion, it feeds to my teammates, it feeds to the coaching staff, it feeds to coach Hill," Rosario said. "Me coming out early and getting us going, I felt like that fed a lot of energy to the big guys as well. We were determined to win this game and I thought the (early) stretch I had set the tone."

Rutgers seized control with a 13-0 run. Freshman Dane Miller got it started with a 3-pointer from the left wing and capped it with a sweet drive and double-clutch layup at the left block. In between he fed N'Diaye for a thunderous two-handed dunk.

"After Vermont we knew we had to play hard," Miller said. "The next day, practice was crazy. We didn't want anything like that to happen again."

Asked if there was a lot of running at that practice, Miller replied, "not a lot of running — a lot of yelling."

The Scarlet Knights led 46-35 at the half, and their offensive stats were sensational: 10 assists and a .586 field goal percentage, including 7-of-10 from 3-point range. On the other end UMass shot just .344 but.

Rutgers continued to coast until the game's final 10 minutes. After sophomore forward Gregory Echenique (10 points) fouled out at the 7:32 mark, UMass made its push. But N'Diaye, whose playing time had been limited since suffering a hyperextended knee in the preseason, had something left in the tank. He threw down two dunks and blocked two shots down the stretch to help the Scarlet Knights hang on.

"I had to be mindful of the fouls and everything, but I still had to be aggressive. That was the main thing this entire game," said the 7-footer, who logged a season-high 23 minutes. "It's the past, but last game I wasn't as aggressive as I usually am. I'm not giving excuses, I just had to be more aggressive and that's what I played for this entire game. As usual I wanted the whole team to be aggressive and I had to go show the example."

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