

Rutgers' Rosario 'puts on a show' in win over Massachusetts at Boardwalk Hall

By JOHN O'KANE, For The Press | Posted: Saturday, November 28, 2009 |

ATLANTIC CITY - Atlantic City, meet Mike Rosario.

The Rutgers sophomore guard wasted no time introducing himself to hometown fans in the first game of the inaugural Legends Classic at Boardwalk Hall on Friday.

"I was in the zone," Rosario said.

Rosario scored his team's first 10 points of the game and led five Scarlet Knights in double figures with 22 points as Rutgers beat Massachusetts 83-75 before an announced crowd of 5,154.

"Mike Rosario in the first half was just awesome," Rutgers coach Fred Hill said.

The only other time Rosario had played in Atlantic City was down the street at Atlantic City High School, when he played for St. Anthony (Hudson County) in the 2006 Battle by the Bay showcase tournament.

"I'm just happy to be in Atlantic City and to have the experience and to be able to go out there and put on a show, and I think that's what I did tonight," Rosario said.

Rutgers will face Florida today at 8 p.m. The Gators edged No. 2 Michigan State 77-74 in the nightcap.

Rosario opened the scoring 19 seconds into the game with a short jumper and answered an ensuing UMass basket with a put-back layup.

He followed that up with back-to-back 3-pointers - one fading away from the basket and one coming off a screen at the top of the key - to give the Rutgers fans in attendance something to cheer for early.

"You wondered if he was ever going to miss," UMass coach Derek Kellogg said. "He scored the first 10 points of the game for them - that's ridiculous.

"(Rosario) put them on his back in the first half, and that was the difference in the game."

Rosario also grabbed a rebound and took a charge during the spurt, which all happened in the first five minutes of the game.

"I look at it this way," Rosario said. "When I bring a lot of energy to the team and a lot of passion, it feeds off to my teammates and it feeds off to the coaching staff. I just thought that by me coming out today early and getting us going, I think that fed off a lot of energy and a lot of aggressiveness to my teammates. I thought the five-minute stretch that I had set the tone."

UMass (2-3) took the lead one minute later on a layup by Anthony Gurley.

But Rosario assisted James Beatty on a 3-pointer on Rutgers' next possession and the Scarlet Knights (3-1) never trailed again, leading by as many as 19 points at one point in the second half.

UMass cut the lead to four points with 1 minute, 32 seconds left, but three free throws by Rutgers' Mike Coburn down the stretch put the game away.

Rosario finished with a team-high 22 points to go along with seven rebounds, three assists and two steals. He was 4-for-5 from beyond the arc.

Hamady Ndiaye scored 14 points, Coburn had 13 and Gregory Echenique and Jonathan Mitchell each chipped in with 10 for the Scarlet Knights.

Ricky Harris led UMass with 22 points. Gurley added 19 points and six rebounds.

Rutgers plays in the Big East, yet Hill didn't hesitate at the chance to bring his team on a rare trip to the southern half of the state to play some of the country's top teams.

"I think it's great for the fans, and it's great to be here in Atlantic City showcasing the program in South Jersey," Hill said. "I'm out of my mind, that's what some people say. I just really believe that we're building something special right now."

"In order to get to where we want to go, you've got to challenge yourself, and that's what we're all about. We're going to suffer some losses along the way, and maybe some bad ones because of the way the schedule falls, but you've got to build. It's the toughest league in the country, and it takes some time, but we want to challenge ourselves."

Notes: The Atlantic City High School marching band performed at halftime of each of the night's two games. ... UMass' Ricky Harris scored 22 points to move into 10th place on the school's career scoring list with 1,438, passing Horace Neysmith. ... Rutgers used to play in the Atlantic 10 conference with UMass. Rutgers leads the all-time series between the schools 28-20.

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**MASSACHUSETTS (2-3)Totals 24-62 18-27 75.RUTGERS (3-1)Totals 29-52 17-24
83.Halftime-3-Point Goals-Fouled Out-Rebounds-Assists-Total Fouls-A-**

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