

YAHOO! SPORTS

Gators beat Rutgers 73-58 in Legends Classic final

By DAN GELSTON, AP Basketball Writer *Nov 28, 11:05 pm EST*

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ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP)—Florida is flying home with its perfect record intact and a championship trophy as a carry-on item.

Yes, it's early, but coach Billy Donovan's Gators are back in the conversation as a possible NCAA tournament team.

Kenny Boynton scored 19 points and Vernon Macklin had 14 to lead unbeaten Florida to a 73-58 win over Rutgers on Saturday night in the championship game of the Legends Classic.

"We knew that we could compete with these teams, but to come out and actually beat them shows us that we could play with anybody in the country and we just want to keep it going," guard Erving Walker said.

The Gators (6-0) used a 15-4 run late in the second half to put the game away and cap a successful tournament. Led by a near-flawless effort from Macklin, the Gators looked energized one night after they upset No. 2 Michigan State.

Florida won consecutive national titles in 2006 and '07 before settling for two straight appearances in the NIT the past two seasons.

There was no clipping of the nets as they've done before in April. The Gators were simply presented with a trophy at midcourt.

"Even through fatigue and dealing with the emotion of last night, I thought our guys came out and grinded the game out and found a way to win the game," Donovan said.

Walker, who ignited a wild celebration after he hit the winning 3-pointer against the Spartans, was named the tournament MVP. He made another three 3-pointers and scored 11 points with five assists.

The Gators made 7 of 19 3-point attempts—long shots they needed because they

weren't getting to the free-throw line. The Gators attempted only 5 free throws, making two.

Mike Rosario scored 14 points and Hamady Ndiaye had 12 for Rutgers (3-2).

"We've got a very inexperienced team and that showed tonight in stretches," Rutgers coach Fred Hill said. "When things aren't going your way, you need some experience, some maturity, some guys that will settle you down. We're not quite there yet."

Rutgers, used to playing a bruising Big East schedule, hung with Florida for most of the first half and trailed 34-29 at the break.

But Rutgers had no answer as Florida worked the ball inside to Macklin, who slipped behind the Scarlet Knights' zone to score easy baskets while grabbing eight rebounds. He went 7-for-9 from the floor and sparked the Gators in the second half with big dunks.

"I feel like we really have a legitimate post presence that we can throw the ball inside to," Donovan said. "If they want to play him 1-on-1, I feel like Vern's going to make a good move and he's going to get a good shot up at the basket."

One of Macklin's rim-shakers gave Florida its first 10-point lead, and Rutgers called a timeout to regroup.

Whatever Rutgers drew up, it didn't work. Walker and Boynton each hit 3-pointers and the Gators were on their way to remaining perfect.

Rutgers got a dose of what the Spartans felt on Friday. Florida's upset over MSU was its 10th win over a top-five team under Donovan and matched the highest-ranked team the Gators had ever defeated in the regular season.

"We came out and we wanted to show everyone that last night's game wasn't a fluke," Boynton said. "We heard people were saying we were soft. We basically wanted to put pressure on both of these teams early and get the win."

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