

[Back to article](#)



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# Roundup: UF basketball wins Legends Classic

*Staff report*

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ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — After upset Friday, Florida players and coaches were concerned about letdown Saturday.

But after a first half in which Florida lacked its trademark intensity, the Gators regrouped in the second half to beat Rutgers 73-58 and clinch the championship of the Legends Classic.

Florida (6-0) is off to its best start since the 2006-07 season, the second of its back-to-back national title years. No one is making reservations for the Final Four in Indianapolis yet, but after UF's 77-74 upset of No. 2 Michigan State on Friday night, the outlook is brighter than a projected fifth-place finish in the SEC East.

"It's huge for us," Florida sophomore point guard Erving Walker said. "We knew coming in we could compete with these teams but to come out and beat them shows we can play with anyone in the country."

Walker, named Legends Classic tournament MVP following the game, had 11 points and five assists. Freshman guard Kenny Boynton led three Florida players in double figures with 19 points. Center Vernon Macklin added 14 points and tied a season high with eight rebounds.

"We wanted to come and prove that (Friday night against Michigan State) wasn't a fluke," Boynton said. "We wanted to respond well after the win. We heard that people were saying we were soft so basically we wanted to put pressure on both these teams early in the game."

Point guard Mike Rosario led Rutgers (3-2) with 14 points. Backup center Hamady Ndiaye added 12 points and three blocked shots.

Former Gator forward Jonathan Mitchell had six points and four rebounds for Rutgers. Mitchell transferred from Florida to Rutgers following the 2007-08 season.

After an inconsistent first half, Florida pulled away in the final 20 minutes. Florida attacked the basket early, with Macklin and Boynton scoring baskets on back-to-back drives to the baskets. Boynton and Walker hit back-to-back 3-pointers to put the Gators ahead 48-36.

From there, Florida steadily increased its lead, scoring 18 points off 15 Rutgers turnovers.

Against Michigan State, Florida played with nothing to lose. Early against Rutgers, Florida came out flat and at times sloppy with the ball. The Gators had seven turnovers in the first half while forcing just seven turnovers.

"Michigan State is a physical team so there was probably some energy, some legs taken away from our guys," Florida coach Billy Donovan said. "All we tried to talk about was coming out and having good energy. We didn't play a great game in the first half, we played much, much better in the second half but I was just proud of dealing with some fatigue and the emotion of (Friday) night coming out and having a chance to play for a championship we came out and grinded the game out."

Florida jumped to an early 13-6 lead on a Macklin dunk off a nice feed from Boynton. Boynton later hit a 3-pointer to put the Gators up 22-15.

But Florida couldn't get the lead above seven for the rest of the half. Rutgers cut Florida's lead to 24-22 on an Austin Johnson free throw.

Rosario kept Rutgers in the game by scoring his team's last seven points of the half. A Rosario 3-pointer cut Florida's lead to 31-27. On a broken Florida possession, Walker hit a 3-pointer with three seconds left on the shot clock to put Florida back ahead 34-27. But a Rosario steal and breakaway layup with 1:07 left cut Florida's lead to 34-29 at halftime.

"I thought we dribbled too much against their zone in the first half," Donovan said. "We passed much better in the second half."

Freshman Erik Murphy provided a lift off the bench with eight points, three rebounds and a blocked shot.

"He really finished some plays around the basket and did a nice job for us." Donovan said.

**FREE THROWS:** Macklin also was named to the all-tournament team. ... Murphy's father, former NBA and Boston College forward Jay Murphy, attended the game.