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Boeheim addresses some SU basketball issues as Orange prepares for Legends Classic

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Dennis Nett / The Post-Standard

During a timeout, Syracuse head coach Jim Boeheim talks to Kris Joseph in second-half action against William & Mary at the Carrier Dome on Sunday.

The Syracuse University basketball team will participate in this weekend's two-day Legends Classic Championship in Atlantic City, N.J. The Orange play Michigan at 7:30 on Friday, then face either UTEP or Georgia Tech on Saturday.

SU did not practice on Monday, but Orange coach Jim Boeheim participated in a teleconference featuring the four coaches whose teams will play on the boardwalk this weekend. Among the items Boeheim addressed:

His regret that sophomore center DaShonte Riley has been lost for the year at the center position

Riley, who logged valuable minutes last March in the NCAA Tournament because of the devastating injury to Arinze Onuaku, underwent surgery for a foot injury last month. SU has two young centers in Fab Melo and Baye Moussa Keita at its disposal. But Melo has struggled for the Orange and Keita, too, is learning how to play the game at a more advanced level.

The possibility that Rick Jackson might be called on multiple times this season to spell SU's young centers in the middle illustrates how fragile the Orange might suddenly appear in the frontcourt.

Riley, the 7-foot center from Michigan, needed to add bulk to his skinny frame in the offseason. Boeheim suggested he did just that, saying Monday that Riley "was making significant progress" in the fall, before the injury was discovered.

"He's strong, he's physical," Boeheim said. "It's very disappointing that we lost him for the year. I think he would have really helped us."

His analysis of freshman guard Dion Waiters

In Sunday's game against William & Mary, the Tribe's best shooter, Quinn McDowell, made two straight 3-pointers from an area Waiters should have covered in the Orange men's 2-3 zone. Waiters, like most college freshmen, needs to understand that college basketball players can make difficult shots. And that they need to be guarded.

"He's a very good player on the offensive end," Boeheim said. "I think he's getting better on the defensive end and that's a good sign. He's definitely making good progress."

His concerns about his team lacking perimeter punch

The SU coach said he wasn't sure why his team has failed to sink shots thus far. Nobody seems immune to it, he said. Not his veteran guys. Not the guys he might rely on to spell those veterans off the bench. Not his rookies.

"We haven't gotten comfortable yet, haven't relaxed," Boeheim said. "We just haven't put the ball in the basket enough yet. We gotta keep working on it and getting better."

He suggested that his four core veterans -- Kris Joseph, Scoop Jardine, Rick Jackson and Brandon Triche -- "all need to be more aggressive and more assertive." And he pointed to Triche and Joseph in particular as veterans who need to contribute more.

Boeheim vs. Beilein

There was some discussion on Monday about the inability of Michigan coach John Beilein to beat Syracuse over the years.

Beilein coached at Le Moyne for nine seasons. He then moved on to Canisius, Richmond, West Virginia and now Michigan. Canisius and Richmond, of course, are mid-majors. And Beilein was charged with overhauling the West Virginia program when he inherited the job in Morgantown.

Beilein-coached teams own an 0-8 record against the Boeheim-coached Orange.

"We've had better players. That's all," Boeheim said by way of explanation.

Beilein, who just won his 600th game as a head coach, said he has long admired Boeheim's ability to produce winning teams.

"First of all," he said, "I don't think I'm the Lone Ranger in our teams not being able to beat Syracuse. There's a lot of programs in that category."

Young wolves

Beilein described his team as "very, very young," and cited one report that Michigan was the third-youngest team in Division I college basketball to bolster that claim. (Beilein, however, did say he wasn't certain about the accuracy of that report.)

The Wolverines' starting lineup looks like this: Darius Morris (sophomore guard), Tim Hardaway, Jr. (freshman guard), Jordan Morgan (redshirt fr. forward), Evan Smotrycz (fr. forward) and Zack Novak (jr. guard).

Boeheim said he had yet to study film of Michigan (he would start his Wolverines preparation later on Monday), but that he'd watched Michigan play Bowling Green. The Wolverines won that game 69-50. Michigan shot 8-of-17 (47 percent) from 3-point range in that victory.

"It didn't look like a young team," Boeheim said. "They moved the ball, played with a lot of confidence and got good shots."

Michigan was 8-for-22 from beyond the 3-point arc (36 percent) in its second game, an 80-58 rout of Gardner Webb. In that game, the Wolverines dominated the backboards.

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