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Michigan coach John Beilein faces old friend Jim Boeheim at Legends Classic

By MARK SNYDER
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This is just the way John Beilein envisioned it.

Three games for his Michigan [basketball team](#) to warm up before facing serious competition.

Early season whippings of South Carolina-Upstate, Bowling Green and Gardner-Webb have boosted the players' [confidence](#) but now -- against Syracuse tonight and UTEP or Georgia Tech on Saturday at the Legends Classic in Atlantic City, N.J. -- the Wolverines will face two teams far more talented than they've seen.

It begins with the Orange, led by a coach (Jim Boeheim) that U-M coach John Beilein knows very well.

Beilein spent nine years coaching LeMoyne in Syracuse, N.Y., in 1983-92, so he saw Boeheim's rise to the upper echelon of coaches. He faced off against him regularly when Beilein was at West Virginia but has struggled in the matchup.

When a reporter asked why, Boeheim simply said he had better players.

Beilein called Boeheim one of the best coaches ever in college [basketball](#), shown by the regularity of his teams' NCAA tournament trips and conceded he's not alone in struggling against Syracuse since Boeheim took over in 1976.

"I don't think I'm the lone ranger in not being able to beat Syracuse," said Beilein. "There are a lot of people in that category with little success, that's why Jim's been such a great coach for so

long. He has a tremendous program."

"It's not a matter of style. ... He's a great coach every year with a great team."

While this Syracuse team is 4-0 and ranked No. 9, the Orange is not playing to Boeheim's satisfaction as he pointed out this week, saying it's struggling offensively.

There has been an adjustment with so many young players on Syracuse -- with three freshmen and four sophomores on the roster -- but they have three of the Big East's top upperclassmen as well in guard Scoop Jardine and forwards Kris Joseph and Rick Jackson. (Plus one of the freshmen, center Fab Melo, is a McDonald's All-America.)

Beilein has seen enough not to be fooled by their youth and knows that Syracuse's legendary 2-3 zone, which forces opponents to make long-range shots, will be on display as well.

"They play at a pace and a tempo where they're unflappable, whether they're home or away," he said. "When they look at the coach, they know they can win."

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