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Orange and Wolverines clash in A.C. showdown

By Sports Network
The Sports Network

The ninth-ranked Syracuse Orange and Michigan Wolverines will meet up at the Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City this evening, in semifinal action of the Legend's Classic. The winner will take on either UTEP or Georgia Tech in the championship game on Saturday.

Both teams are undefeated on the season but advanced out of regional play in vastly different ways.

The Wolverines made light work of their competition, downing Bowling Green (69-50) and Gardner Webb (80-58) in impressive fashion.

The Orange had a tougher time of it, getting by Detroit (66-55) and then Williams & Mary (63-60).

Syracuse holds a 7-5 edge in the all-time series with Michigan, with the last encounter taking place in the 1998 Maui Classic, won by the Orange, 58-46.

Stingy defensive play has propelled the Orange to a flawless record thus far, as the team is holding foes to just 57.0 ppg, on a mere .352 shooting. The team hasn't had as much success at the offensive end (70.8 ppg, on .404 shooting), but has taken good care of the basketball, averaging just 10.5 turnovers per game. Forward Rick Jackson is a dominant low post player and currently leads the team in both scoring and rebounding, averaging 13.0 points and 13.0 rebounds per outing. Scoop Jardine is not far behind in the scoring column (12.8 ppg) and is the team's top distributor (7.2 apg). Kris Joseph rounds out the top scoring threats on the roster at 11.3 ppg. The Orange didn't shoot the ball all that well against William & Mary (.367), but forced the Tribe into 20 turnovers in the win. Joseph led the way with 18 points, seven rebounds and four assists. Jackson recorded another double-double with 11 points and 10 boards, while Jardine just missed his own with 11 points and nine assists.

The Wolverines are a defensive team by nature as well. Opponents have really had a tough time racking up the points this year, with Michigan allowing a meager 47.7 ppg, on an anemic .305 shooting that includes just .226 from behind the arc. Offensively, Michigan is averaging a pedestrian 71.7 ppg, but makes the most of its opportunities, converting 48.5 percent from the field. Darius Morris has been outstanding in the backcourt, averaging 14.7 points and 8.3 assists per game (both team-highs). Tim Hardaway Jr. is right behind in terms of scoring (14.3 ppg) showing his sweet stroke, hitting 51.6 percent from the floor, including 46.2 percent from three-point range. Jordan Morgan provides the frontcourt balance with 12.0 points and 7.3 rebounds per outing. In the 22-point romp over Gardner Webb, Morris led the way with a double-double of 21 points and 10 assists. Morgan was equally effective down low, with 20 points and eight rebounds. Hardaway threw down 15 points and Stu Douglass came off the bench with 10, as Michigan shot a solid .524 from the floor for the game.

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