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Brick House: Syracuse survives poor shooting night to beat Michigan

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Mike Waters / The Post-Standard



Dennis Nett / The Post-Standard

Syracuse forward Rick Jackson goes to block a shot by Michigan's Zach Novak during Friday's game in Atlantic City, N.J.

Atlantic City, N.J. — The Syracuse University basketball team's offense is beginning to look a lot like the football team's offense.

Syracuse survived a horrendous offensive performance to come away with a 53-50 victory over Michigan in the semifinal round of the Legends Classic here at the Boardwalk Hall.

Baskets were as rare as touchdowns for the Orange.

For the fifth time in as many games, the Orange made fewer than 50 percent of its field-goal attempts — and still won.

Syracuse made just 20 of 48 field-goal attempts (41 percent), but the Orange's 2-3 zone stymied Michigan's shooters.

Syracuse held the Wolverines to 34

percent field goal shooting, including 8-for-30 (26 percent) shooting from 3-point range.

"Our real problem is not our defense," Syracuse coach Jim Boeheim said. "Our offense is not where we need it to be. We're just struggling shooting the ball from the perimeter. I don't think our execution is where it needs to be."

Syracuse's 53 points was the Orange's lowest total since a 63-49 loss to then-No. 1 Connecticut in the 2008-09 season. It was Syracuse's lowest scoring total in a victory since a 49-43 overtime win over Pittsburgh in the 2003-04 campaign.

Syracuse made just 5 of 14 shots from 3-point range, barely made more than 50 percent of its free throws (8-for-15) and committed more turnovers than assists. The Orange even endured a 6-minute long scoring drought in the second half.

"Our offense was just horrible tonight," Boeheim said.

Kris Joseph bailed out the Orange's offense. The junior forward scored a season-high 22 points, falling one shy of his career-best effort. Joseph made 8 of 14 field-goal attempts.

"That's what we're going to need from him," SU guard Scoop Jardine said. "He's a superstar in this league and in the country. When he gets it going like that, I don't think anybody can guard him."

Joseph highlighted his night with a 3-for-6 shooting game from 3-point range. He entered Friday's game with 2-for-14 numbers on 3-pointers.

"Kris made a couple tonight that he hasn't been making," Boeheim said. "That was big."

Syracuse (5-0) will play Georgia Tech, which knocked off UTEP in the first game of Friday's doubleheader, in today's championship. Michigan (3-1) lost for the first time this season.

Syracuse faced its second halftime deficit of the year, trailing 31-29 at the break. A 9-0 run early in the second half boosted the Orange to a 38-33 lead. Syracuse led 44-40 at the 10-minute mark but then went six minutes without scoring.

"Not flowing at all," Jardine said of Syracuse's offense. "It's execution. We're not playing off each other. We've got to start helping each other, setting screens for each other, plus making shots."

During the offensive dry spell, Syracuse went 0-for-5 from the field, 0-for-2 from the foul line and turned the ball over once.

"We're struggling shooting the ball from the perimeter," Boeheim said. "You gotta shoot some. Teams are going to pack it back in, which is basically what Michigan did."

Amazingly, Michigan could only muster a one-point lead during SU's offensive power outage. After falling behind 45-44 with 5:48 remaining, Syracuse got the lead back on a 3-pointer from Jardine at the 4:28 mark.

On SU's next possession, Joseph hit a fadeaway jumper with 3:43 remaining. That would be Syracuse's last made field goal. The Orange survived the final three minutes despite 4-for-8 free-throw shooting.

After the game, Joseph acknowledged Syracuse's offensive woes, but said the Orange would get it together soon.

"All the pieces to the puzzle are going to come together soon," Joseph said. "It's taking us a little longer than anticipated, but we're going to be fine."

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