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Late surge sends No. 10 Syracuse past Michigan

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The Detroit News

Atlantic City, N.J. — No matter how this season turns out, Michigan will look back at Friday's game as one that got away.

In a tight game in which neither team led by more than six points, No. 10 Syracuse pulled out a 53-50 victory over Michigan on Friday in the semifinals of the Legends Classic before 6,273 at Boardwalk Hall.

Michigan (3-1) faces UTEP (3-2) in the consolation game at 5:30 today. UTEP lost to Georgia Tech, 71-61, in Friday's other semifinal.

Stu Douglass and Jordan Morgan scored 11 points apiece for Michigan, which was playing its first game this season away from Crisler Arena.

"It was really good defense by both teams the entire game," Michigan coach John Beilein said. "Usually the defense isn't ahead of the offense this time of year, but it certainly was today. The team learned a lot today and we'll grow from this."

Syracuse started an intimidating frontcourt of Rick Jackson (6-foot-9), Fab Melo (7-0) and Kris Joseph (6-7), along with reserve Baye Moussa Keita (6-10).

Anchoring Syracuse's vaunted 2-3 zone, those players made it difficult — inside and outside — for Michigan.

"They had a lot of size in the middle. It's not like they just had one big guy. They're big at every forward position and even their guards are pretty big," said Morgan, who had eight rebounds.

Morgan (6-9) challenged the zone and hit Michigan's first three shots, but Syracuse stayed ahead behind Joseph's eight points the first seven minutes.

Michigan had its largest lead, 31-25, with 1:15 remaining in the half, but Syracuse scored the last four points of the period and the Wolverines settled for a two-point advantage at halftime.

Syracuse started the second half with an extended 2-3 zone and their pressure defense led to a 9-2 run in the first 3:02.

"They (brought) it out a little bit more, but I think it was the turnovers that we had in the second half that gave them offense," Beilein said. "That was a big momentum swing when they came out in the second half."

The Wolverines answered the run with a 3-pointer by Tim Hardaway Jr. and a fadeaway jumper by Darius Morris to tie it 38-38 at the 15:42 mark.

Syracuse's defense picked up considerably, holding Michigan to 8-of-28 (28.6 percent) shooting in the second half. Still, Michigan kept the game close.

The Wolverines stormed back and took a 45-44 advantage on Douglass' 3-pointer with 5:50 left — but that turned out to be their last lead. Scoop Jardine hit a 3-pointer with 4:32 left that put the Orange ahead for good.

"We're definitely disappointed. We want to win every game. We really felt we could beat this team coming in," Morgan said.

Joseph, who was averaging 11.3 points entering the game, scored 22. Jardine added 11 points and five assists and Jackson 10 points and 12 rebounds.

Michigan vs. UTEP

Tip-off: 5:30 today, Boardwalk Hall, Atlantic City, N.J.

Records: Michigan 3-1, UTEP 3-2

Radio: WWJ

Outlook: Michigan looks to bounce back from its close loss to Syracuse and get a victory before playing at Clemson in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge on Tuesday.

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