

Miners fall to Ga. Tech; UTEP faces Michigan in consolation

By Bill Knight \ El Paso Times

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ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. -- UTEP played so solidly those first 20 minutes -- using a triangle-and-two defense, working the ball for good shots, making those shots.

Ah, but they play 40 minutes.

Georgia Tech came out with a fierce defensive intensity in the second half, forced UTEP into some long-distance bombing and into a few turnovers and danced its way to a 12-0 run. When all was said, when all was done, the Yellow Jackets escaped Boardwalk Hall with a hard-nosed 71-61 victory over UTEP Friday evening in the semifinals of the Legends Classic.

"Georgia Tech did a great job in the second half," UTEP coach Tim Floyd said. "They maintained their composure, they played from behind. We didn't have the poise not to foul on defense. We worked the shot clock down to four seconds, down to 17 seconds and we fouled. It came down to defensive patience and shot selection and turnovers."

Georgia Tech, now 4-1 on the season, never lit up the scoreboard. UTEP's triangle-and-two

seemed to frustrate the Yellow Jackets in that first half and the Miner man-to-man was up to the task for most of the second half. Georgia Tech shot just 33.3 percent from the field in the first half and only 38.7 percent in the final half.

"That was disappointing," Floyd said. "We played good defense, but then too often we didn't get the defensive rebound and they got another chance. They had 16 offensive rebounds."

Iman Shumpert did a good job shadowing Randy Culpepper all over the floor, holding UTEP and

Conference USA's leading scorer to just 13 points. Christian Polk had 12, Julyan Stone 10 and Jeremy Williams added nine.

Georgia Tech only outrebounded UTEP by two in the first half, 21-19, but finished with a 44-35 cushion for the game. Stone and Williams had eight boards each to lead the Miners. But Stone and Williams shouldered much of the blame for the loss -- perhaps unfairly to them.

"The first half we played our style of basketball," Stone said. "Georgia Tech is a great team and they



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played to their style. The whole second half we were out of our game and we couldn't get back

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to it. It was a lack of mental toughness and a lack of leadership. I take responsibility for that as a senior."

Williams said, "We just didn't execute and play to our style. The first half we stuck to our game plan. The second half we didn't execute -- especially on defense. That is my fault, too, as a senior. These are growing pains and we've just got to grow together."

UTEP, now 3-2, could not get it done in the second half. However, much of that might be attributed to the play of Georgia Tech.

"Iman Shumpert did a great job on Randy Culpepper," Georgia Tech coach Paul Hewitt said. "But I think the key was these two guys -- Brian Oliver and Glen Rice."

Rice had 19 points, 11 rebounds, five assists and Oliver had 15 points, 12 rebounds.

"I thought we did a pretty decent job the first half," Hewitt said, speaking of his team's defense. "But you just can't look cool out there and a couple of times we did. I thought these two (Rice and Oliver) and our entire team really stepped it up on defense in the second half."

The Miners really seemed in control of this game in that first half. They had a couple of spurts, leading almost all the way and strolled to the halftime locker room with a 37-31 lead. However, the Yellow Jackets came out with some sting in the second half, holding the Miners scoreless and making that 12-0 run, jumping to

a 42-37 lead before Culpepper made a short jumper with just over 14 minutes left in the game. Georgia Tech led 45-41 at the second media timeout, with 11:56 to play.

UTEP still showed some spark, though. Polk hit a 3-pointer to give UTEP a 48-47 lead as the clock eased under the 10-minute mark. The Miners led again, 54-52, hanging in there. But, down the stretch, Georgia Tech got the easier shots, the better shots.

"We just didn't get the easy baskets we did in the first half," Floyd said.

And, in the end, that spelled trouble on this late November evening in New Jersey ... enough trouble to slip another notch in the loss column for the Miners.

If they had played just one half on this night, well ...

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