



STAFF

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Michigan basketball's long scoring drought costly in 65-56 loss to UTEP



UTEP's Randy Culpepper drives past Michigan's Zack Novak during the second half of the Miners' 65-56 win Saturday night. Culpepper scored a game-high 24 points.

Mel Evans | AP Photo

Updated 9:17 p.m.

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. -- **John Beilein** tried to find anything that would work for his **Michigan basketball** team Saturday evening.

Nothing did. UTEP ensured that.

With its defense forcing turnovers into a breakaway offense that resembled a dunk contest by late in the second half, UTEP handed Michigan a 65-56 loss in the consolation game of the Legends Classic.

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The Miners did it by keeping Michigan from making a field goal for more than one-third of the game -- a 13 minutes, 24 seconds-stretch that spanned the first and second halves.

It was, by far, Michigan's longest drought of the season.

"Oh boy," Beilein said. "I was just trying to find alternatives to what (UTEP) coach (Tim) Floyd was doing to us. ... That was a big thing, we had to score some points somehow.

"So we had to do some things we don't even have in the package because they were blowing up so much of our package."

In many ways, it was similar to what [No. 9 Syracuse did to Michigan \(3-2\) in the second half of its 53-50 win](#) in a Legends Classic semifinal. Different defensive principles, sure, but the same result.

The Orange extended their 2-3 zone out further Friday night to take Michigan's shooters out of the game. The Miners (4-2) did so similarly with a stifling man-to-man defense that pressured Michigan point guard **Darius Morris** and forced 12 turnovers.

A 9-0 UTEP run to open the second half -- capped by a steal and one-handed dunk by Miners guard Randy Culpepper, who led all scorers with 24 points -- accentuated the day.

That run took a tie game and gave UTEP a 38-29 lead. With Michigan shooting 17.2 percent (5 of 29) from 3-point range and 30.2 percent (16 of 53) from the field, the Wolverines weren't much of a threat after that.

"I felt like it was the first time our team had any kind of identity," UTEP coach Tim Floyd said. "We can grow from it."

Meanwhile, the loss sent Michigan searching. The Wolverines missed 15 shots in its extended shooting drought and committed six turnovers.

It also took an offense so predicated on precision and timing and made it look ugly for the second straight night.

"We're still young, so we're kind of looking around for answers a little bit, looking to coach like 'What should we do,'" junior guard **Stu Douglass** said.

"Obviously have to play ball a little bit."

In the first half, Michigan did. Kind of. It struggled from the first half, but played defense well enough to hold UTEP to 29 points.

Then, in the second half, it all unraveled.

Morris led Michigan with 20 points, but many of them came when the Wolverines were trying to do anything to get back in the game. Besides Morris, no Michigan player made more than two shots from the field.

Freshman forward **Tim Hardaway Jr.**, playing against his father's alma mater, struggled for the second straight night on offense, going 1 of 8 from the field and 0 of 5 from the 3-point line, scoring six points.

He, like the rest of the Wolverines, felt some pressure to score when no one could make a shot.

"It felt like 'Hey, there's pressure on us. We've got to make a shot, everyone's taking quick ones,'" Hardaway Jr. said. "You can't do that against a great, experienced defensive team."

By the time Michigan did end its drought on a tough layup from Morris with 8:37 left in the second half, the Wolverines trailed 48-37.

To everyone on Michigan, it felt like an eternity.

"That was a long time," Beilein said.

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UTEP's Randy Culpepper soars for a dunk in the second half of a 65-56 win over Michigan on Saturday.

Mel Evans | AP Photo