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Wolverines come up short in Legends Classic

FREE PRESS NEWS SERVICES

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. — Randy Culpepper might have found a new home on UTEP's bench.

Culpepper responded to his demotion with 24 points to lead UTEP to a 65-56 win over Michigan tonight in the consolation game of the Legends Classic.

Culpepper, the reigning Conference USA player of the year, played like he should come off the bench more often. He was the C-USA sixth man of the year as a freshman, so the rare call as a substitute wasn't totally unique for him.

He responded in a big way, making 10 of 16 shots and igniting a 13-0 run to start the second half that won the game for the Miners (4-2).

"I was OK with it. As long as I finished the game, it was all good," Culpepper said.

The young Wolverines (six freshmen) couldn't match UTEP's quickness and did not score a field goal in the second half until there was 8:35 left. By then, the Miners had pulled out to a 15-point lead to put this win away.

Led by Culpepper, the Miners stunned the Wolverines with a decisive charge to open the second half.

Culpepper converted a quick three-point play and had a thunderous dunk during the game-changing run to make it 42-29 before the Wolverines even scored a free throw.

Culpepper, who started all 33 games last season, hadn't come off the bench since the 2008-09 season.

Coach Tim Floyd told Culpepper, who still played 30 minutes, he would sit because the matchups didn't sit right with him. Whatever other reasons Floyd had for his decision, the move worked.

"I don't know how much we'll do it," Floyd said.

"I don't know how much good it did us."

Culpepper was aggressive offensively and had

several fastbreak dunks off turnovers that took the Wolverines right out of this one. Culpepper made three three-pointers and helped the Miners shoot a sparkling 62 percent (16 of 26) in the second half.

He understands why Floyd may want to keep him a reserve.

"If he wants me to come off the bench for the remainder of the year, I'm down with it," Culpepper said. "It doesn't affect me at all. It's not who starts the game, it's about who finishes."

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Michigan looked nothing like the team that tested No. 9 Syracuse until the final minutes in a three-point loss on Friday night. Coach John Beilein said the missed opportunity from a night earlier had no affect on the Wolverines.

"(We) got tired because of how good they wore us out defensively," Beilein said.

Darius Morris scored 20 points for Michigan (3-2). Michigan missed 24 of 29 three-pointers and made only seven baskets in the second half.

"We have a young team that has a long way to go," Beilein said. "It will get better, they want to get better."

Michigan's offensive funk started in the first half, when it missed 12 of 14 threes. The Wolverines had the advantage at the free-throw line and capitalized off nine UTEP turnovers to at

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least keep the score tied at 29 at the break. Michigan surely could have used the scoring touch of the star of its 1989 national championship team, Glen Rice. Rice cheered on the Wolverines from the sideline while another former NBA All-Star, Tim Hardaway, had to split his rooting interests between UTEP, his former team, and his son, Tim Hardaway Jr., who scored six points for Michigan. Julyan Stone and Isaac Gordon each scored 10 points for UTEP and Jeremy Williams had 10 rebounds. "Players were moving," Floyd said. "We've been a standing team."

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