

[Texas triumph a major step forward for Wolfpack](#)

by [Brett Friedlander](#)



Lorenzo Brown and his N.C. State teammates never stopped battling against Texas on Monday

Change doesn't happen overnight. It's a long, gradual process that takes months, sometimes years to complete.

But it's got to start someplace.

For the long-suffering N.C. State basketball program, that someplace may very well turn out to be the Izod Center in East Rutherford, N.J.

It was there, in the consolation game of the Legends Classic on Monday, that the Wolfpack rallied from 18 points down in the final 11 minutes for an [improbable 77-74 victory against Texas](#).

Though it was just one game on one amazing night, the unexpected result and the performance that led up to it may someday – perhaps as early as March – be looked upon as the catalyst that helped bring about a badly needed change in culture at State.

In reality, the upset of Texas was only the first outward sign that things might finally be different after more than two decades of disappointment and mediocrity. The road back to relevance actually began seven months earlier when athletic director Debbie Yow pulled rabbit out of her red-and-white hat and hired Mark Gottfried as State's new coach.

It was a hire that at the time, elicited a collective yawn from a fan base desperate for a hot commodity such as Rick Barnes, Sean Miller or Shaka Smart. Now that Gottfried's results on the court are beginning to match his early successes on the recruiting trail and banquet circuit, a skeptical Wolfpack Nation is beginning to stand up and take notice.

While former coach Sidney Lowe distracted fans with the flash of a red blazer, empty promises and stories of past glory, Gottfried has delivered substance in the form of defense, hard work and accountability.



New coach Mark Gottfried has replaced flash and empty promises with hard work and substance at N.C. State

Those qualities were on full display Monday, as State battled back to score 30 of the game's final 42 points to stun Barnes' Longhorns.

"It speaks a lot about this team," said junior guard Scott Wood, who scored 16 points despite playing on a painful sprained ankle. "We had every excuse to lay down, but we came back and that shows a lot of character."

What made the display all the more impressive is that it was fashioned by many of the same players who, just over a year earlier, rolled over and played dead under similar circumstances in an embarrassing 87-48 loss to Wisconsin.

That in itself should be reason for optimism.

But even in the afterglow of State's most significant nonconference victory since a 69-68 triumph over No. 20 Villanova in the 2007 Old Spice Classic, the excitement should be tempered with reality.

Remember how carried away we all got after Lowe burst onto the scene with an emotional upset of UNC the first time he faced the Tar Heels? And how quickly the high subsided?

It barely lasted long enough for Lowe to have his trademark blazer dry cleaned.

That's why Gottfried, who seemed just as excited as his players and fans as he chest-bumped and fist-pumped his way into the locker room, was already providing perspective by the time he reached his postgame press conference.

"We're far from a great team so everything helps us," the ESPN-analyst-turned-coach said. "Every positive thing that happens is good for our guys."

Gottfried's message was a simple one. It's still too early to start making those NCAA tournament travel plans.

Though this may have been a good step forward, it was only a first step for a Wolfpack program that still has a long way to go to return to relevance – either in the ACC or nationally.

But you have to start someplace. And at least it's a step in the right direction.