

'Cuse control

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Why not just add another round to the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer -- say tonight -- and let Syracuse play the Knicks?

That would be the logical next step for coach Jim Boeheim's bunch after what occurred over the last two days. Last night, that meant turning the defending national champions into the Tarred and Feathered Heels.

"There's no better feeling for a basketball player," Syracuse guard Andy Rautins said after the Orange destroyed No. 6 North Carolina, 87-71, in the tournament final at the Garden. "If you love the game, then you love tonight."

The Orange (4-0) arrived in the Big Apple this week known best as the team that lost an exhibition game to Division II LeMoyne. They left as a legitimate national heavyweight, beating No. 13 California and the Tar Heels by a combined 38 points.

No player made a bigger name for himself than Syracuse forward Wesley Johnson, who scored 25 points and grabbed eight rebounds last night to snag tournament MVP honors. Johnson, a transfer from Iowa State, scored 17 points and grabbed 11 rebounds in the victory over Cal.

"We still can get better, but I couldn't imagine it being like this [based on] our exhibition games," Johnson said. "This is a championship game in the Garden. I'm still speechless about it."

He should be. Syracuse's vaunted zone defense limited the Tar Heels to 38.1-percent shooting and forced 19 turnovers. North Carolina (4-1) led by two points at halftime, but watched Syracuse seize control with a 22-1 run to start the second half.

"I've been coming here for a long time, and I think the second half was one of the better halves we have played down here," Boeheim said. "Offensively we played as well as we can play in the second half and defensively [too]."

Forward Ed Davis scored 16 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for the Tar Heels, who struggled to get production from their young backcourt.

"They are going to be a very good team, but they are not the team they were last year," Boeheim said. "You have to understand, that is not the national championship team. If that team was here, it would have been a different story."

North Carolina surged to pull within 68-60 midway through the second half before Syracuse made three straight baskets to swing momentum. The final dagger might have been a Rautins 3-pointer with 5:23 remaining that gave the Orange a 77-62 lead.

Syracuse got 15 points and seven rebounds from center Arinze Onaku. Forward Kris Jospher came off the bench to score 12 points.

"I would hate to play that non-Division I team [LeMoyne] on a regular basis if they are better than Syracuse," North Carolina coach Roy Williams said. "It has been a while since someone beat our team that badly."

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In the consolation game, Evan Turner scored 26 points and led Ohio State past Cal, 76-70.

The Buckeyes (3-1) surged to a 52-28 lead early in the second half, only to watch the Bears methodically cut into that lead. Guard Jerome Randle led the Bears' charge with 26 points.

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