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### Syracuse makes quick turnaround

#### Syracuse juiced after 2 big wins in return to N.Y.

Shannon Ryan On college basketball

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Maybe Syracuse will trade in its orange jerseys for "I Love New York" T-shirts.

The Orange beat nationally ranked California and North Carolina by an average of 19 points to win the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer at Madison Square Garden, the same place they defeated Connecticut in a legendary six-overtime Big East tournament game last season.

Syracuse went from unranked to No. 10 in the Associated Press poll -- the third-highest entry in poll history.

And to think, these are the same players who were nationally embarrassed when they couldn't beat Division II LeMoyne in an exhibition three weeks ago.

When **Jonny Flynn**, **Eric Devendorf** and **Paul Harris** left for the NBA, Syracuse fans had the look of a lottery-ticket holder one number off. They knew the Orange would have been money with the return of that group.

Without those players, Syracuse was picked to finish sixth in the Big East. But instead of focusing on losses, Syracuse fans should have been realizing their gains.

The most important was **Wesley Johnson**, a 6-foot-7 transfer from Iowa State. He leads the Orange with 17.3 points and 7.5 rebounds per game.

Last season's peripheral players are showing they can help Johnson as well. Center **Arinze Onuaku** shoots 71.4 percent from the floor; point guard **Scoop Jardine**, who did not play last season because of being part of an ID scam, has a 3.3-to-1 assist-to-turnover ratio; and senior shooting guard **Andy Rautins** shoots 44.4 percent on 3-pointers.

And Syracuse's zone defense, which is known to cause opposing coaches nightmares and shooters headaches, appears to have improved.

Now it's not out of the question to think Syracuse could be better than last season's team. We'll see where the Orange are when they return to New York at the end of the season for the Big East



tournament.

*Close calls:* Every team but Texas in last week's AP top five recorded a victory by fewer than five points against an unranked team. Kansas squeaked by Memphis 57-55; Michigan State survived Gonzaga 75-71; Kentucky needed a game-winning shot by freshman **John Wall** to beat Miami (Ohio) 72-70; and George Mason came within a point of taking down Villanova in a 69-68 loss.

**Swish of the week**This is a double swish for Illinois freshman guards **D.J. Richardson** and **Brandon Paul**. Paul leads the Illini with 16.7 points per game, while Richardson is third with 11.3 per game.

**Brick of the week**Dayton. The Flyers were ranked No. 18 in the AP poll a week ago and seemed to have all the ability to keep climbing the charts.

But that was before they ran into the two-sided buzzsaw of Villanova and Kansas State to fall to 2-2 and out of the rankings.

**Game to watch**Creighton vs. Michigan, noon Thursday, ESPN2.

The Bluejays returned nine upperclassmen, including leading scorer **P'Allen Stinnett**. Upsetting the Wolverines would be just the thing to help their profile come March.

Creighton (35.7 rebounds per game) better be aggressive on the boards against Michigan, which pulls down 43.5 per game.

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