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Veterans face 2 young teams in 2K Sports Classic

Associated Press

NEW YORK — There are basically two kinds of teams in the early part of a college basketball season. There are veteran teams and young teams. The semifinals of the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer have two of each.

The first game of Thursday night's doubleheader at Madison Square Garden will have No. 5 Pittsburgh, which has four starters back from last season, against Maryland, which is turning to a talented freshman class to replace three starters, including star point guard Greivis Vasquez.

The nightcap will follow the same script with No. 13 Illinois, which welcomed back all five starters, going against Texas. The Longhorns had to replace three starters, including swingman Damion James.

"Pittsburgh is ranked where they are for a reason," Maryland coach Gary Williams said. "They have great guards, you can start right there. Great leadership from seasoned guards is a pretty good combination most people don't have. In college basketball veteran guards make a difference, like we had last year."

After four years of turning to Vasquez for every big shot, pass or defensive assignment, the Terrapins (3-0) are trying to find an identity. They set a tournament record with 105 points in a 29-point win over Seattle in the opener, then survived a scare when freshman Pe'Shon Howard's jumper with 4.6 seconds left gave them a 75-74 win over Charleston.

"I'm seeing some good things out of our young players," Williams said. "We do have some veterans from last year, guys who have been there before. We need to get a rotation and a game like Pittsburgh gets you ready for the season."

The Panthers (3-0) have what many consider one of the best backcourts in the country in Brad Wanamaker and Ashton Gibbs. They took turns being the leading scorer in the two regional games and the duo makes things a lot easier for coach Jamie Dixon.

"They obviously had really good years last year and they're better this year," Dixon said. "I always felt Brad was overlooked and underrated. Now he's scored a few points in some games on TV and people are talking about him. He does a lot of things for us."

Illinois (3-0) has that same type of guard in Demetri McCamey, and the Fighting Illini also have some quality big men in 7-foot-1 Mike Tisdale and 6-9 Mike Davis.

"That was one of the comments two coaches said last week, 'Man, we're not going to see that kind of length maybe the rest of the year,'" Illinois coach Bruce Weber said. "You don't realize something like that as a coach. Our guards have some size, too. It's a difference for us. We block shots and get a lot of deflections. If we have that intensity we need on defense it will really help."

Texas (2-0) had a terrible second half of the season after reaching No. 1 for the first time in school history. It got big games from sophomore Jordan Hamilton, who averaged 22.5 points, and key contributions from freshmen Tristan Thompson and Cory Joseph.

"The biggest thing is we have a group of guys who have really started to do the things we need them to do," Longhorns coach Rick Barnes said. "This is a much different style than we have played in the past. They bought in to it so far, but we know we have a lot of growth ahead of us.

"Our two freshmen belong in the conversation with anyone if you're just talking freshmen."

This is the 16th tournament supporting Coaches vs. Cancer. The Gazelle Group, which produces the event, said it has raised more than \$4.5 million for cancer research.

The third-place and championship games are Friday.

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