

# Pitt, Talib Zanna beat Maryland, advance to final of Coaches vs. Cancer Classic at the Garden

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Franklin II/APPittsburgh forwards Gilbert Brown (right) and Talib Zanna (below, shooting) score 11 and 14 points, respectively - two of five Panthers to reach double figures Thursday night.

Pitt coach [Jamie Dixon](#) is still experimenting with

his talented personnel. He went through 11 players in the first half Thursday night as the fifth-ranked Panthers defeated [Maryland](#), 79-70, to advance to the final of the Coaches vs. Cancer Classic at the Garden.

This is arguably Dixon's deepest team ever, but he is quickly discovering how indispensable 6-9 freshman center [Talib Zanna](#) - who was redshirted last year after suffering a broken ankle - can be.

Zanna, who grew up in [Nigeria](#), and came to the [United States](#) in 2006, scored 14 points and grabbed 12 rebounds, shooting 5-for-7. He asserted his dominance early in the second half when he made two jump shots and a layup as the Panthers (4-0) jumped out to a 42-29 lead. Later, he scored on a critical follow up to give Pitt breathing room after Maryland (3-1) pulled within 70-66 with less a minute and a half remaining. Pitt will play [Texas](#) in Friday night's 7 o'clock final, while Maryland plays [Illinois](#) in the consolation game at 5 p.m.

"He's a guy who wasn't ranked high, but he's good," said Dixon, whose Panthers are the [Big East](#) preseason favorites. "We recruit guys where they're going to be, not where they are."

Zanna's father, a successful businessman who died not long after his son committed to the Panthers, would have been proud. Zanna keeps a picture of his father in his locker and touches it every day for inspiration.

Pitt, which got 13 points from guard [Ashton Gibbs](#), put five players in double figures and outrebounded the Terps 49-28.

Early in his childhood, Zanna played soccer. But after an early growth spurt, an older brother encouraged him to take up basketball. Zanna began playing at age 10 and used to run up and down the

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mountains in his country to help increase his strength and speed.

Zanna was discovered by American coaches at a big man's camp in [Lagos](#), which was organized by his friend, mentor and former [Georgetown](#) player [Godwin Owinje](#). He attended Bishop MacNamara in suburban [Washington](#), just 20 minutes away from Maryland's [College Park](#) campus and was a high-profile recruiting target for Terps coach [Gary Williams](#). But he chose Pitt after bonding with a Nigerian professor on his official visit.

Zanna served as the perfect counter to Maryland's 6-10 sophomore star [Jordan Williams](#), who finished with 14 points and eight rebounds, but only got nine shots and was in foul trouble in the 30 minutes he played.

"It's hard when you have 6-9, 6-10 draped all over him," Maryland coach Gary Williams said. "This is a ranked team, not just another team you beat up on."

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