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Pitt stands tall in Garden win over Maryland

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Sometimes effort only can take you so far, and coach Gary Williams and his Maryland team found that out the hard way last night.

Matched against a very large and very athletic Pittsburgh team in the first game of the Coaches vs. Cancer tournament at the Garden, the Terrapins fought hard to the final whistle but ended up losing to the fifth-ranked Panthers, 79-70.

"You're trying to find out how good you are as a team," Williams said after his team fell to 3-1. "We hadn't played anyone of Pitt's caliber so far, but I was proud of our guys because they were working hard."

Though a lot of chatter before the game was about Pitt's veteran guards (Brad Wanamaker and Ashton Gibbs), the real story came with Pitt coach Jamie Dixon's rotation of big men. Against 6-foot-11 Gary McGee, 6-9 Dante Taylor and 6-9 Talib Zanna, the Terps were perpetually outsized and overmatched, getting outrebounded 49-28.

"We did what we came to do on the boards, and I think that was very important," Dixon said. "I think the rebounding thing was really something we emphasized and we did it."

The group of Pitt (4-0) big men is noted for their defense, but Zanna, a freshman from Nigeria, had a breakout game offensively with 14 points and 12 boards.

"I think Talib has a good knack at being around the ball and he continues to improve," Dixon said. "We have a lot of good players, we know that."

That group of big men also shut down Maryland sophomore center Jordan Williams, who Dixon called, "possibly the best low-post scorer in the country."

Williams had 14 points and eight rebounds, most of it coming in the hectic transition during the final five minutes.

"I was tired," Williams said. "Playing against guys like that you get tired eventually. I mean, I felt good, I just felt kind of worn out at end of the game."

It also didn't help the Terps when the Panthers' physical big men committed fouls, as Maryland was 14-for-30 (47 percent) from the line, including 0-for-7 in the first half.

"If we hit our free throws in the first half, we probably have a lead," Gary Williams said. "If you don't convert what you have to convert they're going to make you pay."

In tonight's championship game, Pitt faces Texas (3-0), which beat No. 13 Illinois (3-1) in overtime in the second game last night, 90-84. The consolation game starts at 5 p.m.

The high-flying nightcap was sent to the extra period when Texas' Cory Joseph made a pull-up jumper with 25 seconds left. The overtime saw the Longhorns pull away with the Illini's two best big men -- Mike Tisdale and Mike Davis -- fouled out.

The game also was a national coming-out party for highly touted Texas freshman center Tristan Thompson. He finished the game with 20 points (despite missing his first eight shots from the free-throw line) and seven rebounds.

Demetri McCamey led the Illini with 22 points and six boards.

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