

## Pitt controls rebounds, beat Maryland 79-70

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By Ray Fittipaldo, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Frank Franklin II/Associated Press

Pitt's Gilbert Brown protects the ball from Maryland's Sean Mosley in the first half of Thursday's game at Madison Square Garden in New York.

NEW YORK -- There will be games when Pitt's offense is stagnant. And although it won't happen very often, there will be nights when the defense is subpar, too.

Both of those things happened for long stretches Thursday night against Maryland. But one of the programs other constants was the reason the fifth-ranked Panthers escaped with a 79-70 victory in a semifinal game of the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer at Madison Square Garden.

Pitt showed off its rebounding prowess and earned a place in the championship game tonight against Texas, which defeated Illinois, 90-84, in the other semifinal game.

The Panthers (4-0) outrebounded the Terrapins, 49-28, and gave the Terrapins a taste of Big East basketball.

"If not for the rebounding, I don't know how that game would have went," forward Gilbert Brown said.

It was a good thing the Panthers dominated the glass because Maryland controlled other facets of the game. The Terrapins shot 48 percent from the field, held Ashton Gibbs and Brad Wanamaker in check and forced 16 turnovers.

But Pitt's dominance on the backboards was enough to overcome those deficiencies.

Redshirt freshman forward Talib Zanna was the most dominant player. He recorded his first career double-double with 14 points and 12 rebounds. He was 5 for 7 from the field and keyed an early second-half surge when the Panthers took a double-digit lead.

"Rebounding is our No. 1 goal," Zanna said. "We want to dominate the boards. We won the rebounding battle by 20 tonight, so we did that."

Zanna led a balanced offensive attack. Four other players scored in double figures. Gibbs scored 13 points, Brown and Travon Woodall added 11 apiece and Wanamaker had 10.

After a terrible offensive performance in the first half, when they made only 9 of 30 shots from the field, the Panthers turned the tables in the second half and made 16 of 24 shots.

"We had missed layups and had turnovers in the first half," Brown said. "Like a lot of the ACC teams we play, they like to speed up the game. We just had to play more patient, and that's what we did in the second half."

Even though Maryland shot 48 percent from the field, Pitt made its secondary players make baskets. Sophomore center Jordan Williams, who was averaging 21 points entering the game, was held to 14. He attempted nine shots, and the Panthers also held him to eight rebounds, six below his season average.

Pitt coach Jamie Dixon had Gary McGhee and Dante Taylor assigned to guard Williams, but he also deployed some double teams early to take Williams out of his rhythm.

"You have to give it up to Gary and Dante," Brown said. "They made him take tough shots."

Neither team led by more than four in the first half. And, even though the Panthers struggled with their shooting, they were able to take a 31-27 lead into halftime by outscoring the Terrapins, 10-2, over the final four minutes.

Reserve forward Lamar Patterson scored half those points, including a 3-pointer with 43 seconds remaining that gave his team their biggest lead to that point. The Terrapins only had one field goal in the final four minutes of the half, but they shot 50 percent (13 for 26).

Credit Pitt's ability to shoot free throws and Maryland's inability to make them for the halftime score. The Panthers were 11 for 15 from the line while the Terrapins were 0 for 7.

"Pitt's good, and we made some mistakes," Maryland coach Gary Williams said. "When you don't convert what you have to convert, they make you pay."

Pitt quickly added to its lead after halftime. The Panthers opened the half on an 11-2 run with Zanna scoring six of the points. Gibbs capped the surge with a 3-pointer with 17:43 remaining to make it 42-29.

It appeared that Pitt had seized control of the game, but Maryland answered with a 16-4 run to tie the score at 46-46 with 12:47 left after Berend Weijs completed a 3-point play.

"We came out and executed plays, but then we got away from it," Dixon said. "We started to force some drives, force some shots, and that's how they got back in it."

But Pitt regained its composure and scored the next seven points to retake command. And it was the reserves who did the damage. Nasir Robinson, in his first game of the season after undergoing knee surgery last month, converted a 3-point play, Taylor slammed home an offensive rebound and Woodall sank a shot for a 53-46 advantage.

Maryland kept the game competitive until the final minutes, but the Panthers were able to close the game out by making 7 of 8 free throws in the game's final minute.

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**NOTES** -- Robinson had four points in seven minutes off the bench. ... Maryland was 14 for 30 from the line while Pitt was 26 for 37. ... Maryland came into the game averaging 20 turnovers per game, but the Terrapins only committed nine against Pitt. ... Gibbs had six of Pitt's 16 turnovers.

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Check out Ray Fittipaldo's Pitt B-Ball blog and Paul Zeise's Pitt Stop videos about football exclusively on [PG+](#), a members-only web site from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Our [introduction to PG+](#) gives you all the details.



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