

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Pitt clamps down on Maryland

By John Grupp
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NEW YORK — No. 5 Pitt returned to a familiar formula Thursday night at Madison Square Garden.

After using an up-tempo attack in back-to-back games in which it scored 95 points or more, Pitt relied on old standbys — defense, rebounding and balanced scoring — to beat Maryland, 79-70, in the semifinals of the 2k Sports Classic.

"I'm proud of how hard we played," coach Jamie Dixon said. "We have a lot of good players. We know that, and they continue to improve."

Pitt held Maryland to a season-low point total, posted a 49-28 edge in rebounding and got five scorers in double figures.

Pitt (4-0), which had lost three of its past four games in the normally friendly confines of the Garden, used a 21-4 run spanning the first and second halves to build a double-digit lead and silence the partisan Maryland crowd.

"It was a big game, and I think we were a little anxious out there," senior guard Brad Wanamaker said. "Everybody is trying to make the play. In the second half, we just calmed down."

Maryland (3-1), which has beaten at least one top-10 team 14 years in a row, got as close as 70-66 in the final minutes, but Pitt prevailed to face Illinois or Texas at 7 p.m. today in the championship game. The Panthers were 7 of 8 from the free-throw line in the final minute.

"Pitt's good, and we made some mistakes," Maryland coach Gary Williams said.

Redshirt freshman Talib Zanna recorded his first double-double with 14 points and 12 rebounds, highlighted by a putback that gave Pitt a 72-66 lead with 57 seconds to play. Zanna also scored six points during an 11-2 run to start the second half.

Ashton Gibbs (13), Travon Woodall (11), Gilbert Brown (11) and Wanamaker (10) also scored in double figures, as Pitt improved to 25-11 at the Garden since the 2000-01 season.

For Maryland, Cliff Tucker scored 17 points, and sophomore All-ACC center Jordan Williams had 14 points and nine rebounds but had his double-double

streak snapped at five.

"We double-teamed him early and tried to take him out of his rhythm," Dixon said. "He may be the best low-post scorer in the country. He is really good."

Pitt shot 16 for 22 in the second half after a woeful first in which it shot 30 percent (9 for 30). Still, Pitt led, 31-27, at halftime.

"We felt good that we had the lead," Wanamaker said. "Maybe we didn't deserve it from some of the offensive possessions that we did. In the second half, we adjusted. We knew where we could get open opportunities. Coach told us to be a little bit more patient and look for the extra pass. We did that a couple times and got some easy layups."

Maryland went 14 for 30 from the free-throw line and 2 for 14 from behind the arc.

With the score tied at 46 midway through the second half, Pitt went on a 9-2 run to take the lead for good. Nasir Robinson, in his first action of the season, started the surge with a three-point play. Pitt built the lead to 66-56 on Woodall's jumper at the shot-clock buzzer with 6:12 to play.

"We made some adjustments at halftime," Dixon said. "(Assistant coach Pat) Sandle did a real good job. He made some very good adjustments, and I thought that really helped us offensively in the second half."

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