

Gibbs leads Pitt in win against Texas

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By Ray Fittipaldo, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Frank Franklin II/Associated Press

Pitt Ashton Gibbs shoots over Texas Cory Joseph in the second half of Friday's game at Madison Square Garden in New York.

NEW YORK -- It took Pitt junior Ashton Gibbs more than 60 minutes of basketball to finally get his game going in the championship round of the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer. But when Gibbs finally did heat up, he was so impressive that he was named the Most Valuable Player of the tournament.

Gibbs scored 19 of his 24 points in the second half to lead the fifth-ranked Panthers to a 68-66 victory against Texas in the title game Friday night. The victory improved Pitt's record to 5-0 and gave Jamie Dixon his 42nd victory in 43 tries in the month of November as Pitt's head coach.

That came against the team that was responsible for that lone November loss. Texas defeated Pitt, 78-62, in the championship game of the O'Reilly Auto Parts CBE Classic 51 weeks ago.

The Panthers celebrated with the championship trophy at center court at Madison Square Garden, where they have now won 14 of their past 19 games. Gibbs was joined by Travon Woodall on the all-tournament team. Woodall had another big game off the bench, scoring seven points and dishing out five assists with no turnovers.

But the night belonged to Gibbs, who made 6 of the 10 shots he attempted in the second half. Three of them were 3-pointers. The final one came with 1:24 remaining after Texas had trimmed the lead to one point.

"Ashton did a great job," Woodall said. "He's been making shots since his first game at Pitt. It was just another great performance tonight."

Gibbs was the only Pitt player in double figures and scored more than half of his team's points in the second half. On a night when the other four starters combined to shoot 10 for 31 from the field, Gibbs had to take the team on his shoulders.

"Early in the second half I knew it was time to step up," Gibbs said. "I just wanted to step up and do what I could. I just took advantage of what they were giving me. Coach Dixon was calling some great plays, and the guys were finding me open."

Dixon said Gibbs popped open off five different plays in the second half. The coach said he had a sixth play in waiting, but did not have a chance to use it. It probably would have worked, too, because Gibbs had that unstoppable feeling after a rough semifinal game against Maryland and a tough first half against the Longhorns. At one point in the second half, when the Panthers raced to a nine-point lead, Gibbs scored 10 consecutive points.

"He's a good player," Texas coach Rick Barnes said. "They do a good job of screening. He's an excellent shooter."

Gibbs had to keep making shot after shot because Texas sophomore Jordan Hamilton was keeping his team in the game with his own fine brand of shooting. Hamilton scored a career high 28 points and made five 3-pointers for the Longhorns, who never let the Panthers pull away.

Pitt led 49-40 with 12:22 remaining and 57-47 with 8:17 left, but the Longhorns kept battling and had a chance to tie the score or win in the final seconds after Woodall missed the front end of a one-and-one with 11 seconds to go.

Freshman guard Cory Joseph rebounded Woodall's miss and drove to the basket, but Woodall forced him to the baseline and into a wild shot that did not even touch the rim as time expired.

"I liked how we finished both games here," Dixon said. "We got a couple of leads. I felt like we should have been able to put it away, but a lot of that had to do with Hamilton and the shots he was making."

Pitt played the game at its pace, forcing the run-and-gun Longhorns into a half-court, slower-paced game. Each team shot 42 percent, and Texas only outrebounded the Panthers by two.

The difference was Gibbs not letting his team be denied.

"We ran pretty much every play we have for him, and he kept making the shots," Dixon said.

NOTES -- Senior guard **Brad Wanamaker** was 4 for 13 from the field and scored nine points. ... **Gilbert Brown** was 3 for 9 and scored eight points. ...Pitt was 7 for 14 from 3-point range. ...Texas won the rebounding battle, 37-35. It was the first time the Panthers were out-rebounded in a game this season. ...Pitt returns to action Tuesday night with a home game against Robert Morris.

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