

The Washington Post

Terps can't keep up with Illinois

By Liz Clarke
Washington Post Staff Writer
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ILLINOIS MARYLAND
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NEW YORK - Maryland's second game against a ranked team in as many days offered the chance to extract a measure of redemption from the two-day trip to New York for the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer.

Friday's consolation game against 13th-ranked Illinois also offered a chance for the Terrapins to show that their horrid performance on the free throw line and from beyond the arc in Thursday's loss to No. 5 Pittsburgh was an aberration.

Maryland did incrementally better on both counts, but the story line and result were the same. After leading a favored foe in the first half, the Terrapins fell behind by double digits late in the game and found it impossible to close the gap.

It wasn't for lack of trying, however, in an 80-76 loss that sends the Terrapins back to College Park with a keener sense of where they stand.

At 3-2, Maryland is a team with a greater

work ethic than natural shooting ability, at least at the moment. Against Illinois (4-1), as against Pitt the night before, the Terrapins' effort never lagged. They just weren't able to knock down open shots when they needed them most.

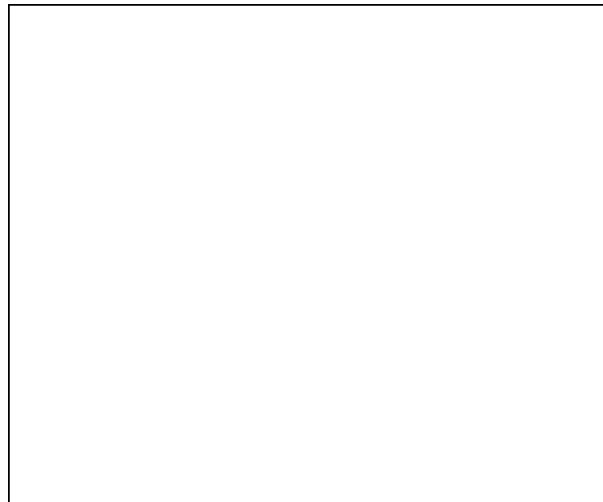
After the Terps trailed by 12 late in the game, freshman Terrell Stoglin drilled a three-pointer that pulled Maryland within two, 78-76, with 14 seconds left.

But fouled by Sean Mosley, Illinois' Brandon Paul hit both his free throws to make it a four-point game with six seconds left.

Neither of Maryland's final two shots, by Stoglin and Cliff Tucker, fell.

Stoglin finished with a team-high 17 points. Sophomore center Jordan Williams, who

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watched all but nine minutes of the first half after drawing two early fouls, still managed a double-double, with 15 points and 13 rebounds (11 of those rebounds coming in a furious second-half effort).

The Terrapins' numbers as a whole were respectable. They shot 43.3 percent from the floor, made 13 of 18 free throws and outrebounded the taller Illini, 45-34.

What swung the game, from the opening minutes until the end, was Illinois' prowess from beyond the arc. The Illini were 10 of 19 from three-point range, with leading scorer Demetri McCamey (20 points) making all three of his attempts.

But the mood in the Terrapins' locker room afterward wasn't entirely bleak, according to Stoglin.

"We're sad that we lost," Stoglin said. "But we have the confidence that we're going to do good. We're learning each other better."

That, in the view of Coach Gary Williams, was the most valuable thing about the experience.

"We came up here wanting to win the tournament, obviously," he said. "But I found out some things I couldn't find out in practice. That's the key against top-flight, well-coached teams that play in great

conferences. . . . Both nights we could have folded, but we didn't - playing [fifth-] ranked and 13th-ranked teams."

Among the things Williams learned was that his team can function without Jordan Williams, at least for a stretch, if need be. Maryland trailed by four points when the sophomore center was sent to the sideline with two fouls with more than 10 minutes to play in the first half. With sophomore forward James Padgett and transfer Berend Weijs shouldering the load in his absence, the Terrapins kept that scoring differential intact, trailing 40-36 at the break.

There were just a few thousand fans on hand for the 5 p.m. tipoff at Madison Square Garden, and Illinois fans outnumbered Maryland's.

Maryland scored with little resistance early,

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hitting six of its first seven attempts. But Dino Gregory, who showed a hot hand early, picked up two quick fouls and was soon followed by Jordan Williams.

Williams returned to the lineup for the start of the second half, and his presence was felt at once on the boards and on putbacks of teammates' errant shots.

But he could do nothing about the Illini's long-range touch. Illinois drilled two quick three-pointers to open up its lead.

Maryland answered with a nine-point run to reclaim the advantage, 47-46.

By the early stages of the second half, Illinois had made 10 of 16 attempts from beyond the arc. And with Illinois countering Maryland field goals with three-pointers, the Terrapins' deficit widened.

With just over 10 minutes to play, Illinois led 59-49.

But Maryland had plenty of fight left, paring that lead to two.

"We're a work in progress, no doubt about it," Gary Williams said. "But we're a pretty good basketball team."

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