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St. John's rally ends with loss to Arizona

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This could be fun.

This could be a lot of fun.

If St. John's plays as it did last night, if the Red Storm continues to pressure teams with their posse of wickedly quick guards, if they keep driving and sticking or kicking, this is going to be a gas.

The undermanned, undersized Red Storm faced their first big-time opponent in their first appearance in the Garden and they played with overwhelming desire against an Arizona team many believe will win the Pac-12.

St. John's fell behind by nine in the first half and by seven early in the second half but continued to rally before falling 81-72 before a raucous crowd that has been rejuvenated by second-year coach Steve Lavin, who has his team playing organized street ball.

"I had a good feeling our players were in a good place to compete," said Lavin.

Big East coaches, who voted the Red Storm 12th in the preseason poll, might have some recalculating to do after seeing the floor savvy of Nurideen Lindsey (18 points), the all-around brilliance of Moe Harkless (13 points, nine boards) and the sphinx known as the matchup zone.

"St. John's has a very underrated team," Arizona coach Sean Miller said.

St. John's (3-1) erased a 54-47 deficit with 15-2 run to take a 62-56 lead with just under 10 minutes to go. Miller, who feared the Red Storm's young talent and the toughness of Godsgift Achiuwa, used two timeouts to stop the bleeding.

But his Wildcats knew they had run into a buzz-saw when Sir'Dominic Pointer banked in a jumper with three seconds left on the shot clock and 7:18 left to give St. John's a 66-58 lead.

The problem was foul trouble. With just seven scholarship players who see time, St. John's was in serious foul trouble. Phil Greene, D'Angelo Harrison, Pointer and Lindsey had three fouls each. When Lindsey picked up his fourth with just under six minutes remaining and went to the bench, the offense went with him.

Arizona (4-0), as deep as the Grand Canyon, capped an 11-2 run to take a 69-68 lead. Lindsey was called for his fifth and the Wildcats reeled off five more before Lavin called a timeout with 3:06 left and his team down 74-68.

The competition got testy with 2:57 left. Harrison, the most emotional of the freshmen, got into some quality lip service with Arizona's prize freshman Josiah Turner.

Harkless stopped the 16-2 run with a pair of free throws. But 'Zona spread the floor and Nick Johnson knocked down a 3 for a 77-70 lead with 2:24 left.

Achiuwa was held out of the starting lineup for being late to the team bus.

* In the first game, Mississippi State upset Texas A&M 69-60 to reach tomorrow night's championship game.

Dee Bost led the Bulldogs with 20 points, going 8-for-10 from the foul line.

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