

Pitt holds off Western Carolina, 79-73

PITTSBURGH (AP) - Pittsburgh trailed by seven points with five minutes to play against Western Carolina Wednesday. In their final tuneup before ACC play, the Panthers were on their heels against their Southern Conference competition.

After head coach Jamie Dixon called timeout, Pitt outscored the Catamounts by 13 down the stretch to notch a 79-73 win. There was no major adjustment, tactical or otherwise, but a resolution by Sheldon Jeter and the rest of the Panthers on the floor.

"We finally started playing harder than them," Jeter said. "All throughout the game to that point they were playing harder than us, they were taking it to us. We finally picked it up and took it to them."

Western Carolina (4-8) went up 61-54 with five minutes to play. Pitt (10-1) finished the game on a 25-12 spurt to survive an upset bid.

Catamounts head coach Larry Hunter noted the ease of which Pitt could overlook Wednesday's game, but didn't think the Panthers played any less hard than usual.

"I think they competed," Hunter said. "When they realized they were in a battle I thought they got after it pretty good and did some good things that way too."

Jamel Artis scored a season-high 29 points to lead the Panthers. When the Catamounts used their zone defense, Artis abused them from inside.

"I feel like I was the key in the middle," Artis said. "When teams play zone the pressure's on me to make plays and I have confidence in my guys to hit shots."

Jeter and Michael Young each scored 12 points while James Robinson added 11.

Rhett Harrelson made 6 of 9 3-pointers to lead Western Carolina with 21 points. Mike Brown scored 13 points, Elijah Pughsley had 11 and Justin Browning chipped in 10.

Western Carolina used an 11-0 run early in the first half to take a 16-8 lead. Pitt responded with 11 unanswered points to regain the lead.

Artis scored Pitt's first 10 points out of the half to give the Panthers a 47-39 lead.

"I think we didn't come out and bring the aggressiveness that we talked about before the game," Artis said.

Western Carolina regained the lead in the second half on Charlendez Brooks' layup to go up 51-50. Pughsley scored eight straight points to give the Catamounts a 61-54 lead with seven minutes left.

Artis tied it at 61 on a jumper two minutes later. After the teams traded baskets, Chris Jones gave Pitt the lead for good at 68-66 when he made a 3-pointer with 2:30 to play.

Pitt looked sluggish after it decimated Davidson 94-69 in Sunday's Gotham Classic showcase game at Madison Square Garden.

Western Carolina lost for the fourth time in five games and finished the Gotham Classic with a 1-3 record.