

Unranked Arizona Shocks No. 3 Maryland

Gardner leads young Wildcats with 23 points in victory

[box score](#)

NEW YORK (AP) -- In just the second game of the 2001-02 college basketball season, Arizona hung up an upset that may be hard to top.

Jason Gardner, the only returning starter from the national runner-up, scored 23 points and the Wildcats shocked Maryland (No. 3 ESPN/USA Today, No. 2 AP) 71-67 Thursday night in the opening round of the Coaches vs. Cancer Classic.

The matchup of half of last season's Final Four -- Maryland lost to Duke in the semifinals -- was one of teams facing very different seasons. Arizona had only Gardner back from its starters, while the Terrapins had four back.

But it's the Wildcats who will play No. 6 Florida in Friday night's championship game at Madison Square Garden. The Gators beat No. 16 Temple 72-64.

"All the preseason talk, that's people's opinions," Gardner said. "All you can do is hope the team stays within themselves and believes in themselves and stays together. All we can do is believe in ourselves."

Suddenly the rest of the country has to start believing in the Wildcats. And it was Gardner, whose four-point play gave Arizona the lead for good, leading the converts.

"Six of these kids are freshmen and to play in the Garden and play against a team the quality of Maryland, certainly that is something that will have some kids' knees buckling," Arizona coach Lute Olson said. "But I didn't see any of our guys back off."

Gardner hit a 3-pointer with 10:32 left that capped an 8-0 run and gave the Wildcats a 53-45 lead.

The Terrapins, who matched the highest ranking in school history as the preseason No. 2, seemed ready to take control as Juan Dixon started a 15-4 run with two 3-pointers and Maryland had a 60-57 lead with 5:45 to play.

Arizona has five freshmen and a redshirt freshman on its 11-man roster. But the Wildcats played like a veteran team with Gardner, a 5-foot-10 junior who applied for the NBA draft then withdrew his name, the most savvy of the group.

With the game tied at 61, Arizona had trouble getting the ball upcourt against Maryland's pressure and barely beat the 10-second count across midcourt. The ball swung to Gardner right in front of the Arizona bench and he hit a 3 as he was fouled by Lonny Baxter.

"We had trouble against the pressure but Luke Walton is such a great passer and he found me and I just let it go," Gardner said of the final tiebreaker. "Baxter came at me and I thought he got a piece of it, then I was on the floor and heard the crowd and said 'it must have gone in.' "

The Wildcats would not trail again as the Terrapins got within two points three times, the last at 69-67 on a rebound jumper by Chris Wilcox with 4.6 seconds left.

Arizona's Rick Anderson made two free throws with 3 seconds left for the final margin.

Walton, the only other significant player back from last year's team that lost to Duke in the final, added 12 points and 12 rebounds for Arizona. Freshman Salim Stoudamire had 12 points.

"I talked to the freshmen before the game," Gardner said. "I told them to believe in ourselves and enjoy the experience. I think a lot of them did."

Dixon led Maryland with 21 points and Baxter had 14 points and nine rebounds.

"Arizona seemed more excited than us," Maryland coach Gary Williams said. "Some players just assume things, that things will continue from the year before, but that isn't so."

"We started 1-3 last year and reached the Final Four so hopefully we can find the right button to push and get them to play hard."

Williams didn't have trouble pointing out reasons for his team's loss.

"I thought we were OK in the second half there, but you have to play defense and rebound and we didn't do that," he said.