

Hill Leads No. 15 Wildcats Over St. John's, 81-72

Solomon Hill had 15 points to lead No. 15 Arizona to a roller coaster victory over St. John's on Thursday night in the semifinals of the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer.

[box score](#)

NEW YORK (AP) - When you have a seven-man rotation and all but one of the players is in his first season of Division I basketball you have to expect there are going to be some tough nights.

St. John's first loss of the season wasn't one of those games where lack of depth and experience were glaring weaknesses.

"I told the team after the game that the style of play in this game is similar to what we're going to see in the majority of Big East games," Red Storm coach Steve Lavin said after the 81-72 loss to No. 15 Arizona on Thursday night in the semifinals of the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer.

"You could see the growth from game to game going back to the exhibition games," Lavin said. "I had a good feeling coming in that the players were in a good place and we could compete. In terms of our quickness, skills, camaraderie, cohesiveness, those aspects, we have them believing we can beat a good team but we still have a long way to go."

The Red Storm are going to have to learn how to handle foul trouble.

The starting backcourt of Nurideen Lindsey and D'Angelo Harrison both fouled out down the stretch when the Red Storm just couldn't handle the Wildcats' final run.

"We've just got to be smart when you get the fourth foul," Harrison said. "You have to move your feet, not gamble on anything that can be a foul."

Lindsey echoed the sentiment.

"You have to be smart but still stay aggressive," he said, "just be a little smarter in a situation like that."

Solomon Hill had 15 points to lead Arizona.

"I don't think we're great right now by any stretch of the imagination but we're a lot further down the road than we were" Arizona coach Sean Miller said. "We are so far away from where we want to be but we have fought through a lot with a young team. We're working through a lot of things and as we do it's gratifying to get the wins we have."

The Wildcats will play Mississippi State in the championship game on Friday night at Madison Square Garden. The Bulldogs (3-1) beat No. 19 Texas A&M 69-60 in the other semifinal.

Lindsey had 18 points for the Red Storm and Harrison added 16.

"It was a great learning opportunity and as disappointed as we are in the loss there was a lot to take away," Lavin said. "Some of the positive things were the resiliency we showed, the ability to take a punch and counter punch. We competed against a team that has more size and depth."

The Wildcats (4-0) led 44-41 at halftime and were up 54-47 about 5 minutes into the second half. St. John's (3-1), one of the least experienced teams in the country, suddenly started running and taking advantage of defensive pressure to go on a 12-2 surge to take a 66-58 lead - and the Red Storm had the crowd at Madison Square Garden behind them.

Arizona, which had started hot from 3-point range before cooling off, suddenly found its stroke behind the arc again in a 16-2 run that gave the Wildcats a 74-68 lead with 3:13 to play.

"I mean we're fortunate to win a game like this in November being so far from home," said Miller, who called

two timeouts in a 40-second span during St. John's second-half run. "We tried to really settle them down and try as best we can to keep our defense tighter. We finished the game with poise."

Kyle Fogg had 13 points for Arizona and Jesse Perry added 11 points and 10 rebounds.

"Those last 8 minutes we really kind of wear on a team as with foul trouble, guys getting fatigued," Fogg said. "I think at the end we really were able to wear them with our depth."

Lindsey and Harrison both fouled out, leaving the Red Storm even thinner, especially in the backcourt.

"That's a tough situation," Lindsey said. "Of course it's a little frustrating wanting to be out there with my guys and keep fighting."

Harrison said he and Lindsey have to play smarter when they do get in foul trouble.

"We're a small group," he said. "We just play hard and you can't sleep on us."

Arizona, which is 6-1 at Madison Square Garden since November 2001, was expected to have a big advantage on the boards, but the Red Storm stayed with the Wildcats and were outrebounded 34-33.

"We talked about rebounding all week," Lavin said. "We're going to have to rebound by committee and take a gang approach to it."

The Red Storm's big run came when they relentlessly attacked the rim instead of settling for outside shots. Lindsey, a sophomore junior college transfer, was the key, stealing or tapping the ball from the top of the 1-1-3 zone and turning them into points on the break. St. John's finished with a 14-4 advantage on fastbreak points and it outscored Arizona 36-20 in the paint.

"St. John's has a very underrated team," Miller said. "They lack some depth and they're very young but they have some very talented players and I thought from their perspective they gave great effort."

The Red Storm made 11 of their first 13 shots from the field in the second half and finished 12 of 19 in the half (63.2 percent).

Arizona was 9 for 17 from 3-point range in the first half and the Wildcats cooled from the outside until their big run.

Nick Johnson started it with a 3 and Fogg added another. Johnson hit another 3 with 2:26 left after St. John's had closed within 74-70. Arizona finished 14 of 29 from beyond the arc.