

No. 5 Pittsburgh Holds Off Maryland, 79-70

Talib Zanna finished with 14 points.

[box score](#)

NEW YORK(AP)—When No. 5 Pittsburgh arrived in New York for the semifinals of the 2K Sports Classic the talk was all about their veteran backcourt of Ashton Gibbs and Brad Wanamaker.

As they head to the championship game, a freshman forward drew all the raves. Talib Zanna had 14 points and 12 rebounds to lead the Panthers to a 79-70 victory over Maryland on Thursday night.

The 6-foot-9 Zanna, who averaged 8.3 points and 8.0 rebounds in his first three games, led the Panthers (4-0) on a night when Gibbs and Wanamaker barely combined to match the 19.3 average they both came in with.

“He played well this summer and continues to improve. He works very hard,” Pittsburgh coach Jamie Dixon said of the native of Nigeria who played at Bishop McNamara H.S. in Forestville, Md., 15 miles from Maryland's College Park campus. “He's a guy that wasn't ranked high, and you know what that means, but he's good, and again, we recruit guys where they're going to be, not where they're at, and if you have a desire to get better and want to get better and you're willing to pay the price, that's what you get. He's getting better.”

Maryland coach Gary Williams was impressed with Zanna's performance.

“He plays with energy, that's his job, to give his team a great offensive rebounder and do all the dirty work that most guys don't want to do,” Williams said.

Pittsburgh will play the winner of the No. 13 Illinois-Texas game for the title on Friday night in the tournament that benefits Coaches vs. Cancer.

The Panthers closed the first half on a 10-2 run for a 31-27 lead, then started the second half on an 11-2 run with Zanna, who had two points and five rebounds in the first half, scoring six points that gave them a 42-29 lead with 17:43 to play.

“We moved the ball a little bit better, I just thought we were fighting their pressure and not how we wanted to do it,” Dixon said. “We had some ball movement, hit a shot, and in the second half we came out and really executed some plays.

“We got away from it, we got the lead, then we forced some drives, forced some shots, and that got them back in it,” he added. “You can't do it in stretches.”

Maryland (3-1) came right back with a 14-2 run that made it a one-point game with 13:20 to play.

The Terrapins tied it one more time at 46 on a three-point play by Berend Weijs with 12:47 left, but the Panthers took the lead for good 11 seconds later on a three-point play by Nasir Robinson.

Cliff Tucker had 17 points to lead the Terrapins, who hurt themselves at the free throw line, making 14 of 30. The missed free throws kept Maryland from getting closer than six points down the stretch and offset a fine defensive effort on Pittsburgh's veteran backcourt.

“Of course it's a concern,” Williams said of the foul shooting that was well off the 68.5 percent the Terrapins shot in the first three games. “We make our free throws the first half, we probably have a lead. What are you going to do? We've been doing this a long time. A guy came out with a book how to shoot free throws, he'd probably be coaching on some island out in the Caribbean.”

Gibbs, a junior, finished with 13 points on 3-for-8 shooting, while Wanamaker, a senior, had 10 points in 25 minutes as he was limited by foul trouble.

“I think that was something that's going to be a strength of ours,” Dixon said of having people who can score other than the guards. “Some games we'll have it, other games we've had guys score big for us. ... I think we have a lot of good players, we know that and we continue to improve. They're young guys but they're good, they continue to compete and get better in practice.”

Gilbert Brown and Travon Woodall both had 11 points for the Panthers, who improved their record at Madison Square Garden since 2000 to 25-11.

``It was a great opportunity for us to come out and play," Woodall said. ``This is the Mecca, Madison Square Garden, and it was a great chance to play a great team.

``Just being able to defer to last year's guys, some of the big games we had last year, we're able to really play these big games and have a lot of confidence that we can win them."

Jordan Williams had 14 points and eight rebounds for the Terrapins, who were outrebounded 49-28, including 15-6 on the offensive end.

``We had a lot of guys this is their first big game, it happened to be at Madison Square Garden," Williams said.

``I thought they did OK. We'll see where we go from there."

Both teams struggled from 3-point range with the Panthers finishing 3 for 10, while Maryland was 2 for 14.