

St. John's Rallies Past Lehigh, 78-73

Coach Lavin returns with a win.

[box score](#)

NEW YORK (AP) - God'sgift Achiuwa had 21 points and eight rebounds and St. John's rallied from a 14-point second-half deficit for a 78-73 victory over Lehigh on Wednesday night to give coach Steve Lavin a win in his return to the bench a month after prostate cancer surgery.

The Red Storm were down 60-46 with 11:09 to play, then turned on the defensive intensity in holding the Mountain Hawks scoreless for almost 6 minutes to get back in the game. St. John's then kept it up over the final minutes to take control and give Lavin the victory.

Lavin made a surprising and understated return, walking out to the court just minutes after the Red Storm came out for pregame warmups. The students behind both baskets erupted into cheers and started chanting, "We love Lavin!"

The former UCLA coach was wearing what has become his coaching uniform since last season, a black sports jacket with a white shirt, no tie and white sneakers. The rest of the staff was wearing the same thing, as it did during Lavin's absence.

Lavin had prostate cancer surgery on Oct. 6 and assistant Mike Dunlap ran the team in his absence, including the Red Storm's season-opening win over William & Mary on Monday night.

Moe Harkless and Nurideen Lindsey added 15 points each for the Red Storm, which trailed 43-33 at halftime.

C.J. McCollum, the nation's leading returning scorer with a 21.9 average, had 19 points on 6-of-17 shooting to lead Lehigh.

St. John's took advantage of Lehigh going cold from the field - both inside and out - to get within 60-58 on a rebound basket by Harkless with 5:50 to go. Holden Greiner hit a turnaround 23 seconds later, Lehigh's first points in almost 6 minutes. Harkless hit a 3 - the Red Storm's second of the game in nine attempts - to tie the game at 64 with 3:40 to go.

Gabe Knutson's three-point play on a rebound basket gave the Mountain Hawks the lead back, but Lindsey and Sir'Dominic Pointer hit drives and St. John's had its first lead since 2-0. The Red Storm took the lead for good at 70-69 on a basket by Achiuwa, who had a perfect shooting night, making six field goals and nine free throws.

The Red Storm (2-0) will face No. 16 Arizona in the semifinals of the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer at Madison Square Garden on Nov. 17. Lehigh goes to Liberty, Va., for three games from Nov. 18-20.

It was the second straight game the Red Storm struggled in the first half and then rallied behind their defensive pressure to take over the game in the second half.

The Mountain Hawks (0-1) hit their first five shots from the field - all 3-pointers - in taking a 15-9 lead. They only hit one more 3 in eight attempts the rest of the half but their patience had them up by as many as 16 points, the last time at 36-20 on two free throws by McCollum with 5:35 left.

The Red Storm managed to get within 40-33 on two free throws by Achiuwa with 1:32 left but Jordan Hamilton hit the Mountain Hawks' only field goal of the final 3 1/2 minutes, a 3-pointer with 3 seconds left that made it 43-33.

St. John's shot 57.9 percent from the field (11 of 19) but was down 10 points, mostly because of Lehigh's early shooting from beyond the arc, patience and offensive rebounds - the Mountain Hawks had six in outrebounding St. John's 13-10.

Lavin sat between assistant Rico Hines and special adviser Gene Keady, who gave him his first collegiate coaching job, on the bench and was his usual animated self, exhorting players, badgering referees and often just standing with his rolled-up program in hand. In the second half, when the Red Storm made their run, Lavin

went into a defensive stance as his team tried to get Lehigh to turn the ball over against the full-court pressure.

St. John's is one of the least-experienced teams in the country, with just one player back from last season's squad that went 21-12 and played in the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2002.

The teams entered this game with the all-time series tied 1-1. Lehigh's last win was in 1909, while St. John's won in 1930.