

Guards Lead No. 21 Wake Forest Over Memphis Deacs' Taron Downey scores career-high 20 in 85-76 win

[box score](#)

NEW YORK (AP) -- Taron Downey wasn't supposed to play. Instead, he starred.

Taron Downey scored a career-high 20 points to lead Wake Forest over Memphis in the opening game of the Coaches vs. Cancer Classic.

Playing eight days after an emergency appendectomy Downey scored a career-high 20 points to lead Wake Forest (No. 21 ESPN/USA Today, No. 20 AP) to an 85-76 victory over Memphis on Thursday night in the Coaches vs. Cancer Classic.

The junior guard was considered questionable for the first game of the college basketball season. He didn't start for the Demon Deacons as he did in all 31 games last season, but he was the key factor in the second half as they built a 14-point lead with 4½ minutes to go at Madison Square Garden.

"I've been hurting and Coach told me earlier in the week I wouldn't be playing," Downey said. "I tried it yesterday and it felt good."

Look out if he starts to feel great.

"I was surprised he was even playing," Memphis coach John Calipari said. "He's a veteran ACC guard. He wasn't afraid. He knew what to do when he got the ball."

Downey hit three 3-pointers in a 3:15 span of the second half, the last two part of a 13-3 run that gave Wake Forest a 73-59 lead with 4:30 to play.

The first two of the 3s came when Jamaal Levy rebounded missed free throws by his teammates and got the ball out to Downey at the 3-point line.

"I didn't think at the time those two baskets were big, but when I look back on it they were," Downey said.

Calipari called them devastating.

"They took the wind right out of our sails," he said.

Rodney Carney had 19 points for Memphis, which used pressure defense to keep it close late in the game. But Downey was able to get the lead to 80-70 with 45 seconds to go when he found Vytas Danelius underneath for a dunk.

Downey was 7-for-11 from the field and had five assists in 29 minutes. Justin Gray added 12 points for Wake Forest, which won its 10th straight season opener. Eric Williams had 11 points and heralded freshman Chris Paul, who started in Downey's place, added 10 as did Trent Strickland.

"I was hoping Downey wouldn't play so we could bother Paul," Calipari said.

Wake Forest coach Skip Prosser was happy with Paul and his classmates.

"The freshmen gave us a good lift," he said. "Chris Paul will get better and better."

Billy Richmond had 14 points for the Tigers, who played in the opening game of this eight-team event for the second straight year. Last season they beat eventual national champion Syracuse 70-63 in the opener.

Antonio Burks had 13 points and nine assists for Memphis, while Sean Banks had 10 points and 14 rebounds.

"That was a good win against a good Memphis team," Prosser said before sounding like most coaches after the first game of the season. "We have a lot of things to work on."

