

Johnson scores 18 as Pitt rolls past Gardner-Webb 99-80

PITTSBURGH (AP) - Plenty of the numbers from Pittsburgh's breezy 99-80 victory over Gardner-Webb looked pretty.

And none of them mattered to coach Kevin Stallings. Sure shooting 54 percent and never being challenged on Monday night was nice, especially three days after needing double-overtime to hold off Eastern Michigan in Stallings' coaching debut with the Panthers. Yet Stallings is more concerned about whether his team is ready for a far sterner test on Thursday against SMU at Madison Square Garden in the 2K Classic.

"You look at our defensive numbers, they were indicative of a team that was not really wired into play," he said. "That's my fault. That's my job."

Cameron Johnson scored 18 points and made all four of his 3-point attempts for Pitt (2-0). Michael Young put up 18 points and seven rebounds in 15 minutes after being held out of the starting lineup for only the second time in his career due to a minor violation of team rules. Sheldon Jeter added 14 points and a game-high 13 rebounds.

Still, the Panthers led the Runnin' Bulldogs trade baskets early in the first half and for long stretches in the second. Stallings wonders if his players are getting a little too caught up in the free-flowing offense Stallings brought with him from Vanderbilt.

"Maybe I've sent the wrong message about tempo and offense and things like that," Stallings said. "We're not ready to beat anybody that's equivalent to us in terms of talent because we don't sustain any type of defensive intensity."

At one point in the first half, Stallings pulled the entire starting five off the floor in frustration. "I think he just wanted more effort and energy," Johnson said. "He cited a lack of focus for that."

Not that much was required over the final 30 minutes after a 10-0 burst that included a pair of 3-pointers by Johnson to give the Panthers a 30-14 lead that was never threatened.

RUNNIN' WITH THE PANTHERS

LaQuincy Rideau finished with a career-high 23 points for Gardner-Webb (0-2) while adding eight rebounds and six assists. David Efanayi scored 20 points and Liam O'Reilly chipped in 14. The Runnin' Bulldogs spread the floor to provide Rideau with room to slice his 6-foot-1 frame through the lane. "I felt there was little more space where maybe we could attack the paint off the dribble," Gardner-Webb coach Tim Craft said. "The problem is we weren't converting. Some of the finishes were a little wild."

BIG MAN DEBUT

Pitt junior Rozelle Nix made his long-awaited debut after missing last season with a foot injury. The 6-foot-11, 300-pound Nix entered with just over 4 minutes left and finished with four rebounds and an emphatic block on Gardner-Webb's DJ Laster that sent Nix's teammates erupting off the bench. "He got me once like that once," Jeter said. "I'm not ashamed to admit it. I'm not afraid to admit it."

BIG PICTURE

Gardner-Webb: After managing just 44 points in a lackluster loss to SMU in the opener last week, Gardner-Webb was happy to try and keep pace with Pitt in what Craft called a learning experience for a young team that will rely on Rideau and Efanayi - both sophomores - to carry some of the scoring load. Pitt: Despite the defensive issues, the Panthers seem to have quickly embraced what Stallings wants to do on the other end of the floor. The Panthers made 13 of 26 3-pointers and finished with 29 assists on 35 field goals.