

Providence takes 2K Classic with win over Saint Louis

By DENIS P. GORMAN

NEW YORK (AP) — Maliek White elevated from behind the arc and fired. As the ball rotated through the stillness into the hoop the shot clock sounded.

No matter. The shot was good. And as he ran up court, White shook his head in a fashion that recalled Michael Jordan's head shake after drilling six 3-pointers in Game 1 of the 1992 NBA Finals.

While White's head shake may not join Jordan's in the pantheon of the sport's great moments, that hardly mattered to White, his coaches and his teammates.

"Today was one of those days where whatever we threw up went in," head coach Ed Cooley said after Providence won the championship game of the 2K Classic with a 90-63 win over Saint Louis at Madison Square Garden on Friday night.

Providence (3-1) had four players finish in double-figure scoring to help the Friars to their second straight win. Rodney Bullock scored 15 points to lead Providence, while Alpha Diallo, Maliek White and Makai Ashton-Langford each scored 11.

"I give them a lot of credit," said Saint Louis coach Travis Ford. Javon Bess led the Billikens (3-1) with 16 points, and Davell Roby scored 14.

"They did a great job of establishing themselves early on both ends and we never had a run. We never got into a flow."

For all intents and purposes, Providence had the early-season championship wrapped up at halftime. The Friars led 41-21, and 10 players played at least five minutes in the half. All 10 had contributed in a tangible way to help Providence build its lead.

The trend continued in the second half, as the lead grew to as much as 31. The Friars finished with 21 assists on 31 field goals.

"We talk about sharing the ball," Cooley said. "Guys like sharing the ball, moving it around. I took away from today was hopefully we have a couple more shooting nights like we had."

By comparison, Saint Louis struggled to shoot from the field (34.5 percent), from behind the arc (27.3 percent), and to protect the basketball. The Billikens committed 13 turnovers that were turned into 18 points for the Friars.

"They were pretty physical with us," Ford said. "We're usually pretty physical ourselves. So for whatever reason, we didn't respond very well to it."

"We weren't playing through contact at all. We were receiving contact and then we were backpedaling from it rather than playing through it."

Cooley emptied his bench in the final minutes to cap off the rout, and walk-ons Andrew Fonts and Tom Planek each had layups, while Dajour Dickens threw down two alley-oop dunks.

"Those guys are just trying to make a contribution to the team," Cooley said. "They're not going to play as much this year as they may want but at the end of the day I thought they had some individual success toward a team win."

Providence point guard Kyron Cartwright was named MVP of the 2K Classic. He was joined on the all-tournament team by Bullock, Bess, Virginia Tech's Ahmed Hill and Washington's Jaylen Nowell.

BIG PICTURE

Providence: Offensive efficiency is the en vogue philosophy in professional and collegiate basketball. Essentially, coaches, administrators and executives believe if teams can maximize their possessions, the likelihood increases that their programs will win. Exhibit one is Providence. The Friars made 62 percent of their shots from the field, including 90 percent from 3. For good measure, they knocked down 79.2 percent of their free throws.

Saint Louis: Defense is the Billikens' calling card. Against Providence, though, it was declined with extreme prejudice. Saint Louis entered the game giving up 55.7 points per game. Rodney Bullock's lay-up with 14:40 left in the second half gave Providence 57 points.

NOTABLE

Providence: The Friars improved to 7-1 all-time against the Billikens. Providence's only loss to St. Louis occurred on Dec. 16, 1959, when the Friars dropped a 65-61 decision.

Saint Louis: The regular-season tournament championship game was Saint Louis' first since 2011. That team, coached by Rick Majerus won the 76 Classic.