

# THE DAILY ORANGE

## No. 23 Syracuse falls hard to Cal, 73-59, in semifinals of 2K Classic

at Madisn Square Garden on Thursday night. Christmas fouled out with eight points late in the second half.



Sam Maller | Staff Photographer

Rakeem Christmas looks on in the first half of No. 23 Syracuse's 73-59 loss to California in the semifinals of the 2k Sports Classic at Madison Square Garden on Thursday night. Christmas fouled out with eight points late in the second half.

By [Jacob Klinger](#) ASST. SPORTS EDITOR

NEW YORK — A Kaleb Joseph-to-Rakeem Christmas alley-oop on the game's first possession was as good as it got for Syracuse.

Joseph didn't celebrate. The pro-Syracuse crowd did. Soon, though, there was no reason for the Orange or its fans to applaud. Joseph would be chasing California fast breaks and Christmas would be fouling his way onto the bench, then out of the game.

None of the Orange's fast start lasted.

"They showed up tonight," head coach Jim Boeheim said of SU's fans, "we didn't. That's the only problem."

Christmas got into foul trouble for the third game in a row. Syracuse's guards never showed up in force. While each was forgivable against Kennesaw State and Hampton, both were damning against California. No. 23 SU (2-1) fell to the Golden Bears (3-0) 73-59 in the second semifinal of the 2K Classic in Madison Square Garden on Thursday night.

"We just wanted to keep them off the glass. We watched a lot of film this past week and we saw that they got a lot of offensive rebounds off of missed shots and that was the bulk of the offense," Cal guard Jabari Bird said. "So we just decided to keep them off the glass and make them make tough shots all game."

Syracuse didn't, shooting 35.9 percent from the field and 23.5 percent from 3-point range.

And when the Golden Bears stormed down the court after each fruitless SU possession, too often, Christmas wasn't there to protect the basket. For all but 23 minutes of the game, he was on the bench.

On a night when not much worked for the Orange as a whole, depending on freshman Chris McCullough to hold together the defense and Joseph to run the offense also failed. The Garden's public address announcer didn't even pronounce Joseph's name correctly.

But the freshman point guard didn't give the announcer many good reasons to say his name anyway. His four turnovers outnumbered his three assists and his 13 points largely came from drives to the basket that only served as a break from the stream of shots Syracuse guards heaved and clanked.

"He shot when he should've passed and passed when he should've shot," Boeheim said.

A week ago, though, those missed shots would've been SU points.

California head coach Cuonzo Martin said that when he scouted the Orange he saw a team that wasn't shooting well from the field that had depended on offensive rebounds.

"So for us if we can defend and contest shots, keep the perimeter guys in front of us," Martin said. "Not give them anything to square — even with the post guys, not give them anything to square, make them go over the top, then box out, I felt like we had a great chance to win the ball game."

But that wasn't even that difficult for Cal.

Christmas sat out the final 4:21 of the first half. SU trailed just 19-17 when he left the floor, but Syracuse shot 1-of-6 in that stretch and was down 34-22 when the halftime whistle blew. Twenty-four seconds into the second half, Christmas had his third personal foul.

The prospect of Syracuse shooting itself back into the game remained, but it was never anything more than that.

When Trevor Cooney had to take a foul on yet another Golden Bears fast break with 3:37 remaining, the SU fans whose voices had dominated the Garden were either silenced, gone or getting there. Christmas had fouled out of the game three minutes earlier.

Syracuse trailed 65-48. And for the first time all night a “Cal-i-for-nia” cheer could be heard in the Madison Square Garden rafters. When SU returns Friday night, it will be for a consolation game against Iowa.

“Merlin could not do anything by 5 o’clock tomorrow night,” Boeheim said. “We need to get better in the low post and hopefully we’ll make some better decisions.”

Published on [November 20, 2014](#) at 11:46 pm

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