

syracuse.com

## Syracuse basketball beats Iowa 66-63 at the 2K Classic (Brent Axe recap)

Brent Axe | [baxe@syracuse.com](mailto:baxe@syracuse.com) By Brent Axe | [baxe@syracuse.com](mailto:baxe@syracuse.com)

on November 22, 2014 at 6:00 AM, updated November 22, 2014 at 9:11 AM

It wasn't quite Lloyd Christmas **totally redeeming himself to Harry** on the way to Aspen, but the Syracuse University basketball team got a little redemption at Madison Square Garden on Friday night with a 66-63 win over Iowa.

Syracuse's **loss to California on Thursday** at MSG inspired lots of takes hotter than an **atomic pepper from Dante's** of the Orange landing in the NIT, so they needed to fan the flames a little bit.

Like the first game at MSG in the 2K Sports Classic, there were plenty of signs of a young team that is going to need time, lots and lots of time according to head coach Jim Boeheim, to come together.

But a win is a win as they say and now the Orange can return home, perhaps catch a **hockey game this weekend** with a big rink where their court is supposed to be at the Carrier Dome and get back to work for a game with Loyola waiting on Tuesday night.

### The Sunny Side

- Bronx native Chris McCullough definitely had the best two-day stay of any Syracuse player at the 2K Classic, fueling Syracuse's win over Iowa with 20 points, 9 rebounds, 3 blocks and the key play of the game for the Orange.

With 8.4 seconds remaining, McCullough jumped a pass in the middle of the zone to make the steal and deflate Iowa's chances at a 15-point comeback and what would have been a demoralizing loss for Syracuse.

"Chris made a great steal. He came across in our trap and just made a great play," Boeheim said. "That was the game. If he doesn't come across and get that one, we don't win. It was a great play."

Syracuse has only played four games, but you can see the progress McCullough is making game-by-game. He is using his athleticism to overcome his lack of size. No play spelled that out more than a slick reverse lay-up in the second half.

McCullough is getting to the boards and evolving into another threat down low to take pressure off Rakeem Christmas.

The lack of bulk on his 212-pound frame will hurt Syracuse at times, but you can't ignore the kid's upside.

- Christmas bounced back from a so-so game on Thursday with a strong inside effort against a big Iowa Hawkeyes front line, dropping 18 points on 7-of-11 shooting.

Christmas played with precision and confidence around the basket. Even though he got into foul trouble again, he is clearly missed when not anchoring the inside of the zone.

It appears his nickname of "Rock" has developed into an appropriate one as he is the foundation this team currently sits on.

- Trevor Cooney watch gets a thumbs up from the Iowa game as he dropped in 14 points, hitting all three of Syracuse's 3-pointers. Cooney also played solid defense against the Hawkeyes, collecting three steals.

We'll forgive him for the missed three-steal-blown dunk combo that most of us would just rather forget about anyway.

I liked how Cooney took an opportunity to attack the basket in a key spot in the second half. He also stroked in one of this 3's from the top of the key. He doesn't shoot from that spot

often. Given his inconsistency from the wing, maybe Boeheim should try to line up more screens to set up Cooney in that spot.

- The true essence of having a sunny side and a dark side in this column points to the games played by Kaleb Joseph and Michael Gbinije against Iowa.

Joseph was much more aggressive against Iowa than against Cal on Thursday and distributed the ball much better in collecting 9 assists.

Gbinije's dunk to put SU up 57-43 looked like a game-clincher at the time. With 6:53 to go, Gbinije made a key steal. This was more of a game that complimented his grit and hustle than style as he finished with 7 rebounds and 3 steals.

## The Dark Side

- Syracuse nearly handed away a game in which they held a 57-43 lead in the second-half, committing a slew of turnovers and flirting with disaster when Iowa turned on the press.

Syracuse had 10 turnovers in the second half with a bulk of them coming in that run after only committing four in the first.

"They came with the three quarter-court trap and we threw it away four times," Boeheim said. "That allowed people to get open shots and now they're back in the game."

- Remember when I said that this was the kind of game that Gbinije and Joseph would appear in both categories? Here's the dark side for them.

Joseph added five turnovers to his 9 assists. He is still hesitating on shot selection and even when he decided to pull the trigger, several were badly off the mark in a 3-for-10 shooting performance. A decision to pull up and take a jumper from the foul line with much more space to drive drew a bewildered look and "you gotta be kidding me" instruction from

Boeheim. One of Joseph's 3-point attempts was the worst one I have seen attempted by Syracuse this season.

Gbinije wasn't much help on the offense end for Syracuse, shooting 1-for-8 and turning the ball over four times.

Gbinije needs to be a reliable bench option for Syracuse who can change the tenor of a game positively. When he's off offensively, it hampers an offensively challenged team even more.

Syracuse got away with it in this game due to Christmas and McCullough's strong offensive efforts.

## **This, That and the Other Thing**

- Friday's game was the third all-time meeting between Syracuse and Iowa. The Hawkeyes won the previous two games, the last of which came during the 1979-80 season.
- Interesting note from [syracuse.com](http://syracuse.com) colleague Mike Waters:

"Syracuse barely avoided losing twice in the month of November, which is a rarity for the Orange.

Syracuse had lost twice before Dec. 1 just three times in Jim Boeheim's 39-year tenure.

The last time came in the 2007-08 season when the Orange suffered losses to Ohio State and UMass. The Ohio State loss was in the PreSeason NIT at Madison Square Garden. The UMass loss was at the Carrier Dome.

The loss to UMass on Nov. 28, 2007, marked the last time that Syracuse lost a game in November."

- The Orange avoided what would've been their first back-to-back losses at Madison Square Garden in the same tournament since falling to South Carolina and Temple in the 2002 postseason NIT.
- Syracuse is 14-3 overall in five appearances in the 2K Classic
- Syracuse is 94-75 all-time at Madison Square Garden (76-47 under Jim Boeheim).

© 2014 syracuse.com. All rights reserved.